

# Hairy Willowherb

*Epilobium hirsutum*

Willowherb Family

## **Class C Noxious Weed: Control Required**

### **Identification Tips**

- Semi-aquatic perennial herb covered with soft hairs
- Grows up to 6 feet tall
- Stems are erect and branched
- Showy rose or purple colored flowers with four notched petals
- Leaves are opposite, lance-shaped with toothed edges and attach directly on the stem
- Long, narrow seed pods that split open to release numerous seeds with long white hairs

### **Biology**

- Spreads primarily vegetatively by thick rhizomes
- Also spreads by windblown seeds
- Flowers from July through August
- Rapid growth and spread in early autumn
- Has the ability to adapt to submerged areas through the development of aerenchymal tissues

### **Impacts**

- Aggressive growth pushes out native plant species
- Forms dense stands that impedes water flow in waterways and wetlands
- Easily spreads to undisturbed areas

### **Distribution**

- Found in low pastures, ditches, wetlands, stream banks, fields and meadows
- Grows in moist to wet soils; often found growing in the same areas as the weed purple loosestrife
- Prefers sunlight and open spaces without dense tree cover
- Rhizomes can grow submerged in water or in water-saturated mud, but will also spread to undisturbed meadows



*Don't let the pretty flowers fool you. This is an invasive plant that wreaks havoc on wetlands and stream banks.*



*Hairy willowherb was originally planted as an ornamental but it quickly escaped gardens and has spread aggressively throughout much of the United States.*

### **Questions?**

King County Noxious Weed Control  
Program Line: **206-477-WEED**  
[www.kingcounty.gov/weeds](http://www.kingcounty.gov/weeds)

## What You Can Do

Since known distribution of this noxious weed is limited in King County, eradication is possible. Do your part by checking regularly for hairy willowherb on your property and along public waterways and wetlands. If a infestation is spotted, please contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program.

## Control Methods

Most control methods need to be applied over several years to be successful. Due to the highly invasive nature of hairy willowherb, off-site composting is not recommended as a disposal option.

**Prevention:** Beware of varieties sold as ornamentals. If recreating in areas with hairy willowherb, check boat hulls, motors and other equipment for plant fragments that can be transported to new waterways.

**Manual:** Small infestations can be dug up, bagged and disposed of in the regular trash, taking care remove as much of the rhizomes and root fragments as possible. Mature flowering stems can be cut *at base* in late summer or early fall to prevent seed production. Brush off boots and clothes before leaving the infested area. Site must be checked for regrowth from missed root fragments and seed dispersal.

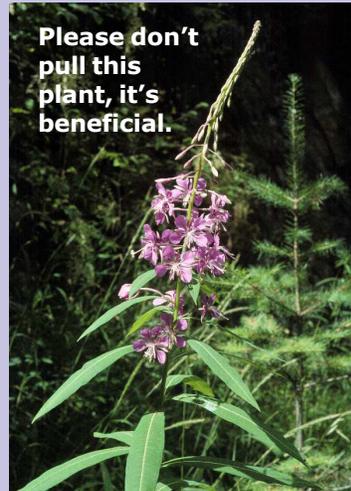
**Mechanical:** Cutting or mowing by itself is not an effective control option for hairy willowherb. Shoots and adventitious roots will develop. Black plastic covering is an interim option for dense seedling infestations. It does not kill mature plants, but it does slow down growth and seed production.



*Hairy willowherb is an invasive intruder that needs to be removed.*

**Chemical:** Chemical control options may differ for private, commercial and government agency users. **Follow all label directions and local regulations regarding herbicide use in sensitive areas.** Certain herbicides cannot be used in aquatic areas or their buffers. If herbicides are used, make sure that their label specifies your type of site. All aquatic herbicides are restricted-use herbicides. Purchase and application of these herbicides can only be done by licensed aquatic herbicide applicators. Permits are required before applying aquatic herbicides. For site specific herbicide recommendations, please contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program.

## Native Look Alike: Fireweed



**Please don't pull this plant, it's beneficial.**

Fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*) is a perennial herb with a similar appearance to hairy willowherb. This plant also grows in open fields and pastures and likes wet soil.

Why worry about the confusion? Hairy willowherb is an invasive, non-native plant to the Pacific Northwest, while fireweed is a native, beneficial plant that is welcome within the landscape. It quickly colonizes open areas after fires, helping to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion. Fireweed was once used by native Americans as a vitamin source and to heal cuts.