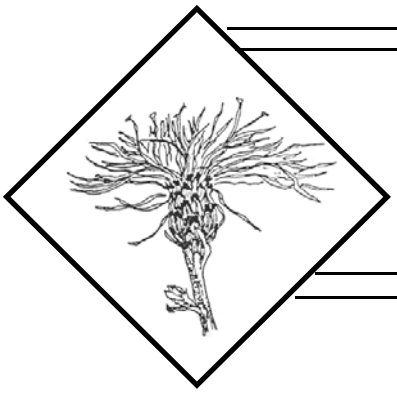
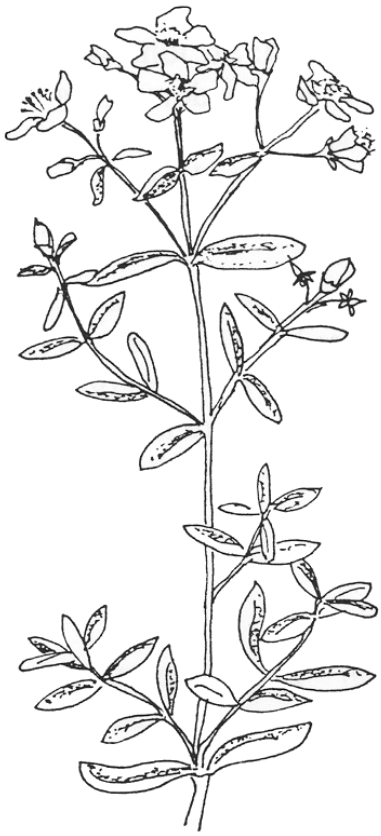


Weeds in the Garden
St. Johnswort

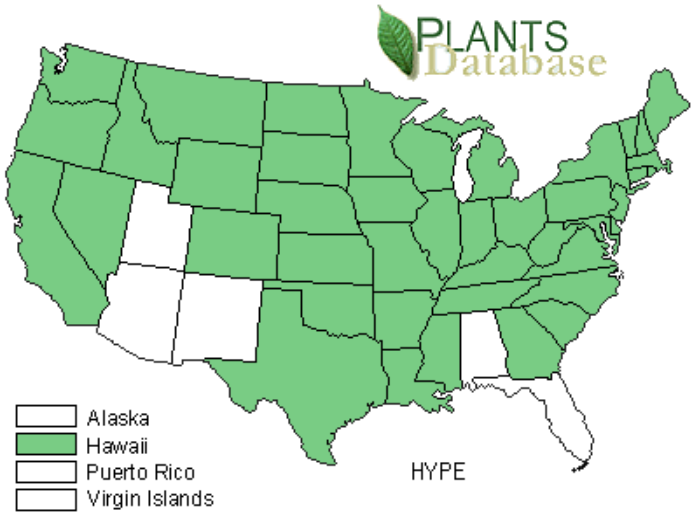


Common Name: St. Johnswort

Scientific Name: *Hypericum perforatum*

Characteristics: St. Johnswort is a perennial that spreads by seed and underground rhizomes. Stems are reddish and woody at the base. Plants can grow to three feet with numerous branching stems from the base. Leaves are opposite, entire and narrowly oblong. Leaves are one and 1/2 inches or less and grow the entire length of the stem. When held up to light, the leaves have tiny translucent dots (thus the Latin name *perforatum*). Flowers are found in flat groups at the top of branches. They have five deep yellow petals that are ¾ to one inch in diameter. Fruits are capsules with numerous seeds. Each seed has a gelatinous covering, allowing it to stick to animals, humans or machinery when wet.

Current Range: found through much of the U.S.



"Look Alikes": Spotted St. Johnswort is similar in size and shape but has distinctly black spotted leaves. Other members of the St. Johnswort family lack the speckled dots on the leaves.

Habitat: St. Johnswort prefers sandy, gravelly soils but can be found in heavy soils as well. It typically grows in areas where the ground has not been tilled for at least a year. These include roadsides, abandoned fields, orchards, Christmas tree plantations, or ornamental plantings.

Origin: St. Johnswort was named after the Teutonic sun god Baldur, probably for its bright yellow flowers. During early Christian times, it was re-named for St. John the Baptist, whose feast day was June 24. It has also been called Klamath weed or goatweed. A native to continental Europe, it was brought to England and was introduced to North America by early European settlers. It was first collected in Michigan in 1839. In recent years, its use as a herbal medicine to aid in treatment of depression has heightened interest in cultivation and use of the plant.

The Problem: St. Johnswort is a particular threat in areas where livestock graze. While not preferred forage by domestic animals, if food is scarce it may be eaten and result in health problems for the livestock. It is especially problematic for light skinned animals, which can become sun- light sensitive, develop skin blisters and experience hair loss from feeding on the leaves and stems. Problems also arise if St. Johnswort is mixed with hay crops.

St. Johnswort has adaptations which help it compete with other plants and invade new territory. In winter, its leafy base retains the leaves. This allows the plant to photosynthesize during warm periods and gain extra energy for growth. In addition, having leaves low to the ground helps the plant reduce moisture loss. St. Johnswort can form new plants from its underground rhizomes, making it possible for the plant to form dense colonies. It also produces thousands of tiny seeds per plant.

Solutions

Prevention – Education and citizen awareness can play a huge role in controlling this exotic species. Gardeners and landscapers can slow its spread by eliminating its use in yards and gardens. Plants already in cultivation can be removed and destroyed.

Biological – In Washington state, several species of insect have been used to control St. Johnswort and have had some success in reducing plant health and numbers.

Mechanical - Cultivation of the soils can eliminate St. Johnswort in agricultural areas. Mowing several times during the summer season can prevent seeds from maturing. Pulling is effective for small infestations but care must be taken to remove the entire plant. If roots are left in the soil the plant may re-sprout.

Chemical - Herbicides can be an effective tool in managing St. Johnswort. Special care must be taken in areas where grazing is allowed. Repeat applications may be necessary. In areas where vegetation is dense, non-target species may be impacted by herbicides. In these instances, spot spraying or sponge wipers may be advisable. Prior to use of chemical herbicides, it is important to consult with local natural resource staff to determine which herbicides would be the most effective and would have the least impact on native species. It is also essential to follow safety instructions on the selected product.

For more information please contact the
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