

Bluebur

Lappula squarrosa (Retz.) Dumort.

Alternate Names

stick-tights, beggar-ticks, stickseed, sheepbur, European sticktight, bur forget-me-not, European stickweed

Synonyms

Lappula echinata Gilib.;
Lappula myosotis Moench

Description

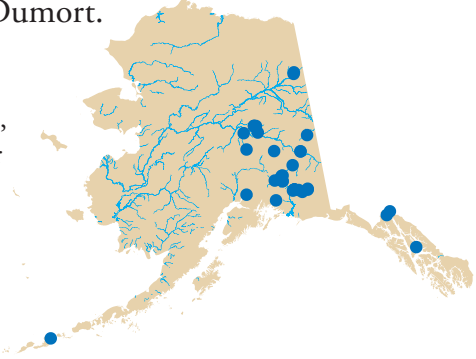
Bluebur is an annual plant that is profusely branched with stems up to 2 feet tall. The entire plant is covered with stiff, white hairs and has a mousy odor. The hairs usually lie flat against the stems and leaves. Leaves are alternate, $\frac{3}{4}$ –4 inches long, and covered with stiff white hairs on both surfaces. The lower leaves are oblong, stalked, and blunt-tipped, whereas the upper leaves are stalkless. Flowers are blue with a yellow throat, resembling forget-me-not flowers but smaller, about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch across. They appear near the ends of stems in leafy clusters. Each flower produces 4 small nuts with 2 rows of hooked prickles that have star-shaped tips. Fruit stalks are straight and erect.



Photo by Alexander Mkrivicka

Similar Species

Western bluebur (*L. occidentalis* (S. Wats.) Greene) is a weedy annual plant, native to Alaska, that can be distinguished from bluebur by its nuts. Western bluebur nuts have 1 row of hooked prickles, while the exotic bluebur nuts have 2 rows. Stick-seed (*Hackelia floribunda* (Lehm.) I.M. Johnson) is native to British Columbia and resembles



Family: Boraginaceae

Bluebur

both bluebur species, but the fruiting stalk of stick-seed is curved or bent downwards.

Management

Bluebur plants can easily be pulled up by hand, though several weedings and 5 years of monitoring are necessary to ensure control of plants germinating from buried seed. Diligent care must be taken to remove and dispose of nuts that attach to clothing or gear during control efforts, for this species is commonly introduced to new areas by animal and human dispersal (Densmore et al. 2001).

Notes

Bluebur was introduced into the United States from the eastern Mediterranean region before 1700. Now common throughout the northern hemisphere in disturbed areas, it has reached far-flung locations in Alaska since its first documentation in the Matanuska Valley in 1931, likely due to its tendency to hitchhike. It is listed as a restricted noxious weed in Alaska (Alaska Administrative Code 1987).



USDA Forest Service photo by Elizabeth Bella



USDA Forest Service photo by Michael Shephard