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Weed control – Herb Robert

Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) is a Washington State Class B invasive annual that thrives in understories, displacing native herbaceous species. Herb Robert is shade tolerant and exhibits higher recruitment in dense shade, though it can also persist under open canopies by producing fewer, larger individuals. This species prolifically produces seeds that are ejected as far as 20 feet from the mother plant and are otherwise dispersed by a sticky thread appendage that attaches to passers-by. The seeds germinate either soon after dispersal in the fall (overwintering as a small rosette) or in the spring, resulting in up to 250 individuals per square meter. Seeds are viable for at least three years. Herb Robert has five-petaled pink flowers and dissected leaves that exude a pungent odor when crushed, thus explaining the other common name for this species, stinky Bob. Excellent photographs are available at the WTU Herbarium's on-line Image Collection (<http://biology.burke.washington.edu/herbarium/imagecollection.php>) and a line drawing is available on the USDA's on-line plant database (<http://plants.usda.gov:8080/plants//profile?symbol=GERO>). Herb Robert requires at least a partially shady site but is otherwise tolerant of a wide range of environmental conditions. In fact, even disturbance is not required for herb Robert to invade new areas. Because this species is a relatively new invader, increasing public awareness of identification characteristics, ecological impacts and control methods is imperative.

Chemical control can be quite effective if herb Robert has already established a monoculture on a site. Glyphosate (Roundup™) is most commonly used. However, herb Robert often occurs initially as part of a mosaic along side desirable native species. In these situations, alternative control methods that have the ability to target individual plants can more successfully meet all goals of a project.

Smothering may be an effective means of control if herb Robert forms a uniform stand or exists as clumps in the landscape. Cover with overlapping sections of cardboard and 3-4" of mulch and reapply mulch on a yearly basis. Monitor for resprouts for at least three years. Plant competitive herbaceous species such as woodland strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) that naturally form a dense mat.

Control small populations by hand-pulling individuals. Plants are rooted shallowly and will come up easily, especially if the soil is wet. However, due to a brittle root system, it is important to grasp firmly at the base to remove the entire plant. Mechanical equipment, such as weed whackers, also can be used to prevent seed set of patches of this annual. Cut back in early summer. However, follow-up measures will be necessary to control resulting individuals from the existing seed bank.

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