



Common Weeds on the Campus of Saint John's University

Introduction

Perhaps my favorite definition of a weed comes from Ralph Waldo Emerson who presumably said, "A weed is a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered." From a more botanical perspective, weeds are typically introduced or alien or exotic plants that have become naturalized and are particularly common in disturbed areas. Thus, they are common in gardens, farm fields, along roadsides, near buildings, lawns, and virtually any other area that has been in human contact. In nature, weedy plants would also grow in disturbed areas. These areas would have been disturbed by an assortment of by natural features such as fires, floods, trees falling, volcanoes, etc.

Most weedy species produce numerous small seeds that are highly dispersible. This is important since weedy species evolved to "jump" from one natural disturbance to another. The seeds are usually long-lived so that they can wait out periods without disturbance. Typically, the plants are small and grow quickly. Thus, most are herbaceous, though

there are some exceptions (*i.e.*, European buckthorn). Most weeds are annuals, though there are some particularly nasty biennial (*i.e.*, bull thistle, musk thistle) and perennial (*i.e.*, dandelion) weeds. The large majority of our weeds are not native but have been introduced from other parts of the world leaving behind their normal biological controls.

Some weeds cause such a problem that they are classified as 'noxious'. Minnesota statute defines a noxious weed as a plant that is "injurious to public health, public roads, livestock and other property." Minnesota recognizes about 30 noxious weeds that are **prohibited** and must legally be controlled or eradicated. They cannot be transported without a permit or sold in the state. **Restricted** weeds are widely distributed and are illegal to import, sell or transport in in Minnesota. They would be classified as prohibited if an effective means of control was known. **Specially regulated** plants are those that may be natives but pose ecological, economic or health concerns such.

Table 1. Minnesota noxious weeds

Category	Taxa
Prohibited (<i>includes species in both the Eradicate & Control lists</i>)	<i>Carduus acanthoides</i> – Plumeless Thistle <i>Celastrus orbiculatus</i> – Oriental bittersweet <i>Centaurea stoebe</i> ssp. <i>micranthos</i> – Spotted knapweed <i>Cirsium arvense</i> – Canada Thistle <i>Euphorbia esula</i> – Leafy Spurge <i>Humulus japonicas</i> – Japanese hops <i>Lythrum salicaria</i> – Purple Loosestrife <i>Pastinaca sativa</i> – Wild parsnip <i>Sonchus arvensis</i> – Perennial Sowthistle
Restricted	<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i> – European buckthorn <i>Alliaria petiolata</i> – Garlic Mustard <i>Frangula alnus</i> – (syn. <i>Rhamnus frangula</i>)Glossy buckthorn <i>Phragmites australis</i> – Common reed grass <i>Rosa multiflora</i> – Multiflora rose
Specially-regulated	<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i> – Poison Ivy (common) <i>Toxicodendron rydbergii</i> – Poison Ivy (western) <i>Polgonum cuspidatum</i> – Knotweed, Japanese

Checklist of Some Common Weeds:**AMARANTHACEAE**

- Amaranthus retroflexus* – Redroot pigweed
- Chenopodium album* – Lamb’s quarters

ANACARDIACEAE – Sumac Family

- Toxicodendron rydbergii* – Poison ivy

APOCYNACEAE – Milkweed Family

- Asclepias syriaca* – Common milkweed

ASTERACEAE – Sunflower Family

- Achillea millefolium* – Yarrow
- Ambrosia artemisiifolia* – Common ragweed
- Arctium minus* - Burdock
- Artemisia absinthium* – Wormwood sage
- Carduus acanthoides* – Plumeless thistle
- Carduus nutans* – Musk thistle
- Centaurea stoebe* (= *C. maculosa*) – Spotted knapweed
- Cirsium arvense* – Canada thistle
- Cirsium vulgare* – Bull thistle
- Conyza canadensis* - Horseweed
- Grindelia squarrosa* – Gumweed
- Matricaria discoidea* (= *M. matricarioides*) – Pineapple weed
- Sonchus arvensis* – Perennial sowthistle
- Taraxacum officinale* – Dandelion

BRASSICACEAE – Mustard Family

- Berteroa incana* – Hoary alyssum
- Capsella bursa-pastoris* – Shepherd’s purse
- Erysimum cheiranthoides* – Wormseed wallflower

CARYOPHYLLACEAE – Pink Family

- Cerastium fontanum* – Mouse-eared chickweed
- Silene latifolia* (= *Lychnis alba* – White cockle
- Stellaria media* – Common chickweed

CONVOLVULACEAE – Bindweed Family

- Convolvulus arvensis* – Field bindweed

EUPHORBIACEAE – Spurge Family

- Euphorbia esula* – Leafy spurge
- Euphorbia* sp. – spurge

FABACEAE – Bean Family

- Medicago lupulina* – Black medic
- Melilotus officinalis* – Yellow sweet clover
- Melilotus alba* – White sweet clover

LAMIACEAE – Mint Family

- Glechoma hederacea* – Creeping Charlie, Ground ivy

LYTHRACEAE – Loosestrife Family

- Lythrum salicaria* – Purple loosestrife

MALVACEAE – Mallow Family

- Abutilon theophrasti* – Velvetleaf
- Malva neglecta* – mallow

MOLLUGINACEAE –

- Mollugo verticillata* – Carpetweed

OXALIDACEAE – Sorrel Family

- Oxalis* sp. – Wood sorrel

PLANTAGINACEAE – Plantain Family

- Plantago* sp. – plantain

POACEAE – GRASS Family

- Bromus inermis* – Smooth brome
- Setaria* sp. – Foxtail

PORTULACEAE – Purslane Family

- Portulaca oleracea* - Purslane

POLYGONACEAE – Smartweed Family

- Polygonum aviculare* – Prostrate knotweed
- Fallopia* (= *Polygonum*) *convolvulus* – Wild buckwheat
- Rumex crispus* – Curly dock

RHAMNACEAE – Buckthorn family

- Frangula alnus* – Glossy buckthorn
- Rhamnus cathartica* – European buckthorn

SCROPHULARIACEAE – Figwort Family

- Verbascum thapsus* – Mullein

SOLANACEAE – Tomato/Nightshade Family

- Solanum dulcamara* – Bittersweet nightshade
- Solanum nigrum* – Black nightshade

References

- Royer, F & R Dickinson (1999) *Weeds of the Northern US and Canada: A guide for identification*. University of Alberta Press, Edmonton.

