

About Herb-Robert:

Herb-Robert is a low growing, shade tolerant geranium described as both a winter or spring annual or biennial. The deeply-lobed foliage is bright green and turns red in the fall. The stems are covered with white, glandular hairs, that when crushed give herb-Robert its distinctive odor and common name, "Stinky Bob". Herb-Robert reproduces solely by seed. New seedlings appear throughout the growing season and into early winter. Each flower produces five seeds capable of being ejected as far as 20 feet from the parent plant. Connected to the seed is a sticky thread that adheres to leaves, fur, shoes, clothing, and equipment.

Why control Herb-Robert?

Herb Robert will establish and proliferate even in pristine forest communities, becoming the dominant groundcover. By releasing allelopathic chemicals, it is capable of preventing native understory plants from growing, covering as much as 90% of the forest floor. It spreads rapidly into forested areas in western Washington from sea level to about 4,000 feet.

Before you begin:

Create a plan for restoration before removing weeds or disturbing the soil. Herb-Robert germinates much more easily on disturbed soil. If enough desirable vegetation is not present to replace it, newly exposed soil can be sown with native or non-invasive perennial grasses to promote competition.

Shiny & Dovesfoot Geraniums:

Shiny geranium (*Geranium lucidum*), Class B noxious weed, and the much more common dovesfoot geranium (*Geranium molle*) are also highly detrimental to natural areas in San Juan County. Both can be differentiated from herb-Robert by their lobed, rounded to kidney-shaped leaves and lack of offensive odor. Shiny geranium mostly differs from dovesfoot by having very glossy, less densely-lobed leaves with fewer, coarser hairs and smooth, hairless, bright-red stems.



Shiny geranium. Photo credit: W.A.NW/CB

If you would like weed identification, site-specific control recommendations, or additional noxious weed information, contact the San Juan County Noxious Weed Control Program.



San Juan County Noxious Weed Control Program 2020

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Special thanks to the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board, Jenifer Andreas, WSU, and University of California, Berkeley.

Herb-Robert

(*Geranium robertianum*)

(Class B non-designate)

(Control encouraged, but not required by law)



Photo credit: Ben Legler, University of Washington

Herb-Robert Control

By law, herbicides must be used in strict accordance with label instructions.

Research on effective and safe herbicide use is on-going and often contradictory. For more recent information contact the San Juan County Noxious Weed Control Program.

Timing

Early detection and rapid response is the most effective strategy in preventing herb-Robert establishment. Keep areas clean by vigilantly removing small isolated patches and outlying individual plants.

Tools for herb-Robert removal:

- Gloves
- Plastic / paper bags or bucket
- Herbicide & proper protective equipment, if appropriate

Herb-Robert has very weak, shallow roots that make it exceedingly easy to simply pull by hand. The key to achieving control is to make sure every individual plant has been removed each growing season. Herbicides or torching may be ideal for large, dense infestations where herb-Robert has mostly displaced desirable vegetation.

Manual & Mechanical Control

Pulling / Digging: Although easy to pull, the stem is brittle at its base, breaking easily and allowing the highly branched roots to remain embedded in the soil. To prevent its re-flowering, remove the entire root structure by grasping it by the crown. Avoid spreading seeds by bagging the plants as they are pulled. Be aware that the seeds can adhere to clothing, gloves, and shoes.

Cutting / Mowing: Mowing is generally not an effective control option, as plants will continue to re-flower from the root crown. Repeated cutting may also encourage plants to become short-lived perennials.

Cultivation: Cultivation and hoeing are very effective if done before plants flower, but may not be possible in forested settings.

Cultural Control

Sheet Mulching: Sheet mulching can provide excellent control and is compatible with most settings.

Torching: Herb-Robert can be controlled by torching prior to seed production, but will need to be repeated until plants are eliminated.

Competition: Maintaining dense forest groundcovers may help prevent herb-Robert establishment in natural settings.

Biological Control

All known insects that attack Herb Robert also attack other ornamental and native Geraniums, thus making biological controls unavailable in Washington State.

Chemical Control

Always follow label instructions to find the correct herbicide concentration and timing for your site and the method you plan to use.

Timing: In general, systemic herbicide applications are more effective in early spring or in the fall, when soil is moist. Avoid using herbicides when soil is dry or plants are stressed. Adding a dye marker may help you reduce and focus the amount of herbicide used.

Spot Spray: Although a wide variety of systemic herbicides are effective for herb-Robert control, these are often unnecessary due to the ease of manual control. Patches and individual plants can be spot-sprayed with glyphosate, if off-target damage to desirable vegetation is not a concern.



Photo credit: W.A. NWCB



Photo credit: SJC NWCB

Follow-up

Monitor and eradicate new populations while keeping established populations from spreading into non-infested or recently controlled areas. Always purchase weed-free hay and soil.

Disposal: Since herb-Robert can set seed after it has been pulled from the ground, it is necessary to bag the entire plant and discard it in the trash. Plants can also be collected in paper bags and later burned.

Site Restoration: Apply sheet mulch and/or establish dense, competitive native or other non-invasive vegetation. Re-seed bare ground areas with native or non-invasive perennial grasses as soon as possible after removing herb-Robert infestations to reduce risk of subsequent weed establishment.

Native & Non-Invasive Geraniums

There is a vast selection of non-invasive garden geranium species and cultivars available to choose from. For more information on native and non-invasive groundcovers and other ornamentals, please contact the WSU Master Gardeners (360) 378-4414, or your local nursery.

Two geranium species, northern geranium (*Geranium erianthum*) and Oregon geranium (*Geranium oregonum*) are native to the Pacific Northwest. Another native perennial, foamflower (*Tiarella trifoliata*), has similar growth habits and prefers the same habitats as herb-Robert. Forest groundcovers play many important ecological roles. Only select appropriate native species for any re-vegetation in natural areas.



Foamflower (*Tiarella trifoliata*)
Photo credit: Robert L. Carr



Oregon Geranium (*Geranium oregonum*)
Photo credit: Dianne Fristrom