

Blueweed (*Echium vulgare*)

Identification Blueweed or viper's bugloss is a member of the Boraginaceae family. It grows as a biennial to short-lived perennial and reproduces by seeds, termed nutlets. Plants overwinter as rosettes. Rosette leaves are simple, entire, lance shaped, 2.5-10 inches long and covered with fine hairs. Funnel-shaped, five-lobed flowers are bright blue, but may also be purple, pink or rarely white. Flowers have five bright red to pink stamens. Mature plants grow one to numerous erect, branching stems that may reach over 3 feet in height. Blueweed may be confused with others plants such as some of the native *Penstemon* species with blue flowers, which are also funnel-shaped and have five stamens. However, blueweed is distinct due to its brightly colored stamens; short and long hairs that cover the stems and leaves; and the spotted appearance on the stems due to a dark coloring at the base of its long bristly hairs (see photo lower right). Refer to the Extension bulletin (link below) for other look-a-likes and more assistance on blueweed identification.



Impacts While the plant is not considered palatable to livestock, it does contain toxic alkaloids that can cause liver failure when ingested. Blueweed may displace native plants and it is also a known host for several plant diseases, including some viruses spread by aphids and three types of wheat rust.

Habitat This species is typically found in disturbed areas and overgrazed range or pastureland, although it has also been found in well maintained pastures. It thrives in sandy, well-drained soils with low nutrient levels and tolerates dry conditions.

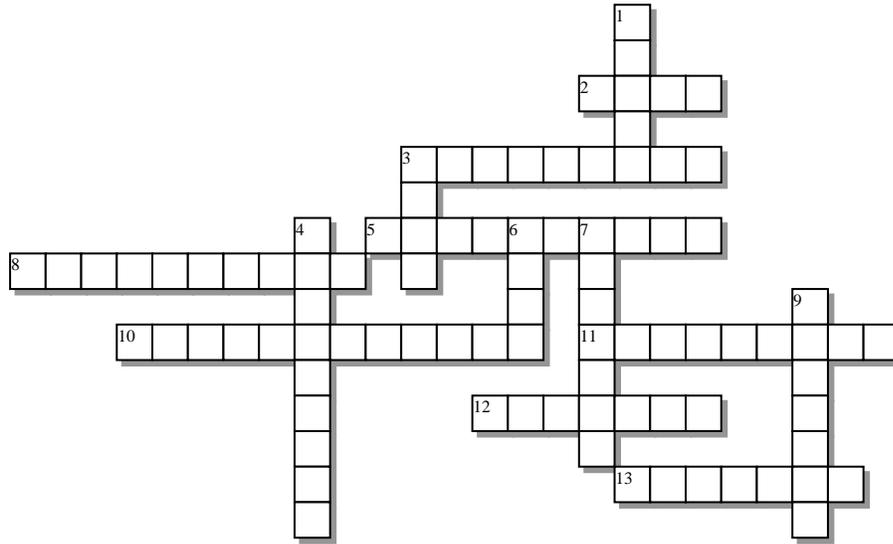
Spread Wind, water, animals and humans all contribute to spread of blueweed. Seeds may be transported long distances as hay and grain contaminants or when they become lodged in vehicles and equipment. Disturbance, especially overgrazing, facilitates blueweed establishment and spread.

Management Priorities Blueweed is a state listed Priority 2A weed in Montana. Small infestations can be managed by hand-pulling or digging, while larger infestations can be treated with herbicides. Early detection of new plants followed by effective action to control them is critical. It has been recorded in 8 counties, predominantly in the northwest part of the state, with the highest number of records in Ravalli County. For more information on blueweed, see "Biology, Ecology and Management of Blueweed (*Echium vulgare*)" EB0195:

<http://msuextension.org/publications/AgandNaturalResources/EB0195.pdf>



Weed Post Puzzle: Test your knowledge of Blueweed



Across:

- 2 - Number of blueweed stamens.
- 3 - Average longevity of blueweed seeds, in months.*
- 5 - Blueweed grows as biennial or short-lived _____ perennial, meaning it typically dies after seed production.*
- 8 - Blueweed is common in disturbed areas and _____ range or pastureland.
- 10 - Common name of state-listed 2B noxious weed in Boraginaceae family that may be mistaken for blueweed.*
- 11 - Blueweed contains these toxic compounds that can cause liver failure.
- 12 - A term for blueweed seeds.
- 13 - On blueweed these are bright pink or red, four are long and one is short.

Down:

- 1 - Dark coloring at base of stout, spreading _____ gives the stem a spotted appearance.
- 3 - Priority level of blueweed in Montana (spelled out).
- 4 - A Montana native plant that may resemble blueweed.
- 6 - Botanical term for the blueweed flower arrangement: a short, flat-topped cluster in which the upper most flower opens first.*
- 7 - Montana county with highest number of blueweed reports to date.
- 9 - Recommended control method for small infestations.

*Refer to the Extension Bulletin for answers to these questions
Solutions are posted on the MSU Extension Invasive Rangeland Weed website:
<http://www.msuextension.org/invasiveplantsMangold/extensionsub.html>

