Blue Flowering Lettuce

A Cooperative Extension Publication
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Blue Flowering Lettuce

(Lactuca puchella)

Other common names: showy lettuce and large-flowered blue lettuce.

This weed is a deep-rooted perennial that reproduces by underground rootstocks and seed. It is found east of the Cascade Mountains and rarely in western Oregon. The plant grows from 2 to 4 feet tall, each plant with a single stalk that generally branches at the top. Upper leaves are lance-shaped, not notched, and connect directly to the main stem. The lower leaves, which vary in length from 2 to 8 inches, are dark bluish-green, larger than the upper leaves, have deeply cut or notched margins, and are connected to the main stem by short stalks. All leaves are smooth and covered with a light, powdery substance. The attractive pale blue to violet head of the flowers is about one inch across and is borne individually in a narrow panicle on stalks that vary from less than an inch to several inches in length. The tips of the strap-shaped petals are notched.

Seeds are about 1/8 inch long and have a short, thick beak, the tip of which expands into a short, cup-shaped disk. Seed is club-shaped and flattened, with thick ridges down the sides. The whole surface is dull and rough. Silky, white down is attached to its tip, which like thistledown is carried by the wind. The entire plant, including its feathery rootstocks, contains a white, bitter, milky juice.

CONTROL. Cultivation is an effective way of eradicating blue flowering lettuce. One season of intensive cultivation (every 21 days) will usually eliminate the plants. Cultivation should be followed with a good competitive crop such as alfalfa, winter wheat, or grass pasture.

The herbicide 2,4-D is fairly effective in controlling blue flowering lettuce. One pound of 2,4-D is effective in control in wheat and barley. Two pounds of 2,4-D is recommended in Colorado for eradication. It should be applied in the early bud stage of growth. Wetting agents should be used with the amine form of 2,4-D. Esters do not need wetting agents. Repeated application for two or three years is needed for eradication.

Tordon at 1 to 2 pounds will control blue flowering lettuce. Follow label directions when using Tordon, or any herbicide.

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