



Phytolacca americana L.

Common Pokeweed

American Pokeweed, Pokeberry, Inkberry

Family: Phytolaccaceae

Origins: Native to the Southeastern United States. It is used worldwide as a food crop*, for medicinal purposes, and as a dye.

Range: Found throughout much of the United States. In Washington, Oregon, and California, infestations are more dense west of the Cascades.

Habitat: Commonly grows in recently cleared areas, waste areas, along fence lines, pastures, and forest clearings. Prefers cool, wet areas.



Impact: Pokeweed is highly toxic to humans and animals. If left unmanaged, it can form dense patches that out-compete native species reducing edible forage species for native wildlife. Pokeweed is a highly sought-after edible plant but can result in death if not prepared correctly. It reproduces by seed; each plant may produce up to 7,000 seeds, which can remain viable in the soil for up to 50 years. Many birds are immune to the toxins and eat the berries, spreading the seeds to new locations.



Description: Pokeweed is a perennial herb that can grow up to 10 feet tall from a tuber-like taproot. Stems are pink to reddish in color, fleshy, partially hollow, extensively branched and can grow 2 inches in diameter. Leaves are lighter green on the under surface, tapered on both ends, and the edges are somewhat wrinkled. They are alternate, simple, somewhat succulent with long leaf stalks, and can reach 13 inches long. When crushed or bruised, leaves give off a strong displeasing odor.

Flowers are greenish-white, in long clusters at the ends of stems. Flowers develop into dark purple berries. Flowers typically bloom from May to October.

Common Look-Alikes: Policeman's Helmet, Knotweed.

** All parts of Common Pokeweed are toxic to humans, pets, fish, and livestock. If ingested raw, the side effects of Pokeweed are noticeable within 2 to 6 hours. Side effects are severe stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea, burning in the mouth, dizziness or lightheadedness, headaches, and in some cases, death.*

Integrated Pest Management - Control Methods

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) combines various methods such as mechanical, cultural, biological, and chemical controls to manage pests. IPM offers the possibility of improving the efficiency of pest control while reducing its negative environmental impacts. For more information, see the Cowlitz County Noxious Weed's IPM Resources & Strategy Guide or contact your local Noxious Weed Control Board to develop a customized IPM plan.

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Non-Herbicide Control

Mechanical (pulling, cutting, digging, etc.)	Small infestations may be controlled by removing the entire top portion of the plant and then digging out most of the taproot. Place all plant parts in a sealed bag. <i>*All parts of the plant are highly toxic; always wear proper protective equipment when handling Common Pokeweed.</i>
Cultural	Maintaining healthy, desirable vegetation can prevent Common Pokeweed infestations. Plowing can be effective; plant a clean cultivated crop (corn or soybeans) for 1 to 2 successive years before reseeding ¹ . Do not introduce this plant to your landscape.
Biological	Biological agents are currently not available for Common Pokeweed in Washington State.

Herbicide Control: Foliar Broadcast Treatment

Glyphosate ^{1,2} (Rodeo, Killzall, Kleenup, Roundup)	Timing: Apply to actively growing plants at least 8 inches tall and before the flowering stage. Remarks: Spray complete uniform coverage, but not to the point of runoff; dust on plants may reduce effectiveness; Glyphosate is nonselective and may injure or kill any vegetation it contacts; refer to the label for use in aquatic areas.
2,4-D ¹ (Many Trade Names)	Timing: Apply to actively growing plants before the flowering stage. For best results, apply when plants are 8 to 12 inches tall. Remarks: Avoid drift to sensitive crops; treatment will only control plants emerged at the time of spraying; do not apply near water.
Triclopyr +2,4-D ² (Crossbow, Crossroad)	Timing: Spring when plants are actively growing; summer before flowering. Remarks: Repeat application for two years to control seedlings; avoid drift to sensitive crops; do not apply near water.
Dicamba ² (Banvel)	Timing: Apply to actively growing plants before flowering. For best results, apply before Pokeweed is 12 inches tall. Remarks: Avoid drift to sensitive crops; refer to label for crop rotation restrictions; grass tolerates Dicamba; do not apply near water; use with a non-ionic surfactant.

* Cowlitz County Noxious Weed Control Board does not endorse any product or brand name. Brand names are listed as an example only. Other commercial products may contain the listed active chemical for herbicide control. Always read and follow the safety protocols and rate recommendations on the herbicide label. **The Label is The Law.**

¹Owen, M. D. K. (1988). Pokeweed. *Iowa State University, University Extension*, 1–2. <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/4073>

²Nice, G., Johnson, B., & Bauman, T. (2005). Pokeweed Control. *Purdue University, Purdue Extension Weed Science*, 1–2. <https://www.btny.purdue.edu/weedscience/>