

# Houndstongue



flower



nutlets



leaf

# Houndstongue

**Genus:** Cynoglossum

**Species:** officinale

**Priority Listing:** 2B

**Biennial**

Houndstongue is native to western Asia and eastern Europe. It was introduced into the United States as a **medicinal** and was used as a folk remedy for ailments including acne, eczema, and fevers.

Houndstongue **inhabits** pastures, meadows, roadsides, disturbed sites.

If ingested by livestock, houndstongue can be fatal because it produces an **alkaloid** that causes loss of production of liver cells. Even if ingested as hay, houndstongue remains toxic. Most animals avoid eating it because of its foul odor.

During the first year of growth, houndstongue forms a **rosette** and a deep, thick **taproot**. The second year, a flowering stem is formed; flowers bloom, seeds are set and then the plant dies.

The name 'houndstongue' was coined because the rosette leaves are broad and oblong in shape; resembling a dog's tongue. The genus name is from Greek; *kynos* for dog and *glossa* for tongue.

The leaves of houndstongue can be up to 12" in length and 3"

in width. Leaves and stems are covered entirely in soft white hairs and leaves are soft to the touch. A houndstongue plant can grow up to 4' in height.

The flowers of houndstongue are reddish-purple in color, have five petals, and bloom from June to July. Flowers produce four teardrop shaped **nutlets** that are 1/3" in length and are covered with tiny hooked barbs that can attach to clothing, animal fur, and even vehicles! A single plant can produce up to 2,000 seeds!



Photo courtesy of Matt Lavin, via Flickr

**Alkaloid:** various compounds which are known for their poisonous or medicinal qualities

**Biennial:** a plant that lives two years, usually flowering in the second year

**Inhabits:** to live in, reside in, or be present in

**Medicinal:** having the properties of medicine; used as a medicine

**Nutlet:** small nut, which is a section of the dried ovary

**Rosettes:** circular clusters of leaves that radiate from a center of a plant, close to the ground, like the dandelion

**Taproot:** a main single root of a plant, generally growing straight down