



# Blueweed

*Echium vulgare* (aka Viper's bugloss)



## Overview:

A biennial or short-lived perennial producing a low growing rosette of hairy leaves the first year, and then a flowering bolt in its second year. Native to Eurasia, blueweed reproduces by seed and is well adapted to dry, rocky or shallow soils. A single plant may produce up to 2,800 seeds that can remain viable for several years. Blueweed is also commonly called Viper's bugloss – the ripe nutlets (seeds) resemble a viper's head. This invasive plant develops a long, stout, black taproot - sometimes 2 or more feet long. Historically, this plant had some medicinal uses.

## Habitat:

Does well in a variety of soil types and pH, as well as nutritionally poor soils, but does not tolerate shade. It requires well drained soils but thrives in gravelly/sandy banks of creeks and rivers. Prefers warm, southern aspects.

## Identification:

**Stems:** Are covered in short, stiff hairs. Stems grow 30 - 80 cm tall and generally have

conspicuous dark flecks at the bases of some hairs. There may be one to several stems per plant.

**Leaves:** Are lance shaped. Basal leaves are narrow, 6-25 cm long and have stalks. Stem leaves alternate and become smaller and stalk-less moving up the stem. All leaves are covered with stiff hairs, and their undersides often have dark flecks.

**Flowers:** Are arranged on the upper side of short, arching stems that elongate after flowering. Flower buds are reddish-purple, becoming bright blue upon opening. The petals are fused at the base. Flowers are hermaphroditic – having both male and female organs – and are pollinated by bees and butterflies.

## Prevention:

The dried stalks of blueweed tend to break off and tumble in winter winds, distributing seed. The bristly, flowering stems can also catch on animal fur. Mid and late summer rains can produce another crop of seedlings.

## Control:

**Grazing:** Blueweed is unpalatable to grazers but is potentially poisonous due to toxic alkaloids. Overgrazing will increase the weed's spread. Invasive plants should never be considered as forage.

**Cultivation:** Cultivation is effective.

**Mechanical:** Mowing can deplete root reserves and prevent seed production. Cut stems encourage re-sprouting, therefore mowing must be repeated to be effective. Hand-pulling is effective in loose soil, but nearly impossible in harder packed soils because of its tough taproot. Instead the plant stem can be sliced off just below ground level with a sharp shovel. Wear gloves and long sleeves as the plant causes itching and rashes.

**Chemical:** Mecoprop-p (in a product mix with 2,4-D and Dicamba) is registered for use on Blueweed. Always check product labels to ensure the herbicide is registered for use on the target plant in Canada by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency. Always read and follow label directions. Consult your local Agricultural Fieldman or Certified Pesticide Dispenser for more information.

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# Blueweed (Continued)

**Biological:** None researched to date.



## REFERENCES

1 <http://www.cabdirect.org/abstracts/19921156006.html>