

# NOXIOUS WEED ALERT

## HERB ROBERT

(*Geranium robertianum*)

- Herb Robert can grow up to ten inches tall, or the stems may sprawl along the ground.
- The stems are **hairy**, branched and brittle at the joints; in bright light conditions they can be red.
- The leaves are finely divided, giving the plant a fern-like appearance. When crushed they emit an unpleasant odor; the plant is sometimes referred to as “Stinky Bob.” The leaves turn red in the fall.
- The flowers are usually pink, five-petaled, about half an inch across.
- The seed-pod has a long-beak, like a stork’s bill.



### Look-a-like:

**Bleeding heart**, (*Dicentra formosa*), is a native plant that resembles herb Robert. Some differences are:

- Bleeding heart is hairless but the stems and leaves of herb Robert are hairy.
- The stems of bleeding heart are not jointed.
- The flowers of bleeding heart are bell-shaped but herb Robert’s are star-like.



### WHY BE CONCERNED?

- Herb Robert invades forest understories, displacing native plants and decreasing species diversity.
- It does not supply food or habitat for wildlife.
- It prevents the germination of other, more desirable, plants.
- It can die back in winter leaving ground bare and susceptible to erosion.

**Herb Robert is a Class B weed.**

### Distribution:

Herb Robert grows in numerous sites in Clallam County, in gardens, forests and parks and along streams and roadsides. It is spreading fast, particularly along the Dungeness River, around the Olympic National Park Headquarters, on Peabody Creek, White Creek and the Elwha River.

## Ecology:

- Herb Robert thrives in moist shady areas, but is adaptable to most environments; it can grow on rocks, in sand, in wet or dry sites and in bright sun or deep shade. It is one of the few noxious weed species that will grow in **undisturbed** areas.
- It reproduces solely by seed and is normally an annual; however, in mild climates such as ours it can become a biennial or perennial.
- Flowers bloom and produce seed year-round, so the seed bank (the number of viable seeds in the soil) is constantly being replenished. The seeds are sticky and can adhere to animals, people or parts of other plants and be dispersed. Seeds can germinate and give rise to new plants at almost any time of year.

## CONTROL

### Prevention and early detection are the best means of control!

- **Do not buy or plant** herb Robert.
- **Avoid** introducing soil, gravel or plant material from areas known to have herb Robert.
- **Remove** seedlings when young, before they have produced seed.
- **Replant** newly weeded areas with desirable (preferably native) plant species that will discourage reinfestation.
- **Dispose** of weeds properly, bag or burn seed heads.
- **Monitor** the site for several years; promptly remove new seedlings.

**HANDPULLING** is the best control method. Because herb Robert has little root structure, it pulls from the ground easily. However, more seedlings will appear until the seed bank is exhausted, so the site should be monitored and seedlings removed as they appear.

**BIOLOGICAL** control is unlikely to be an option because any insect that feeds on herb Robert may also feed on other species of ornamental geraniums, which have economic value.

**THERMAL** control—using a flame thrower to destroy the upper portion of a plant—is a control method used with success on plants like herb Robert that have little root structure.

**HERBICIDES** can be effective, but should always be applied with care. Do not apply herbicides over or near water bodies. Read the label to check that you are applying an herbicide in the right place, to the right plant, at the right time, and in the right amount.

- Tests have shown that preemergent herbicides (those that are incorporated into the soil before seeds germinate) work well on herb Robert.
- Roundup<sup>TM</sup> (glyphosate) has also been effective, but because herb Robert sprawls among other plants, care should be taken not to damage them when applying a non-selective herbicide such as glyphosate.

Prepared by the **Clallam County Noxious Weed Control Board**; revised 11/2000

For more information call: **(360) 417-2442**  
or see [www.clallam.net/weed](http://www.clallam.net/weed)