TWIST
DEFENDERS OF HABITAT

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Herb Robert

Geranium robertianum



Herb Robert flower.

Photo credit: Rob Routledge, Sault College, Bugwood.org



Herb Robert leaves and seed pods.

Photo credit: Rob Routledge, Sault College, Bugwood.org

ALSO KNOWN AS:

Red robin, fox geranium, storksbill, stinking Bob, crows foot.

DESCRIPTION:

Herb Robert is an escaped ornamental groundcover in the Geranium family. It has a distinct pungent smell that originates from short glandular hairs growing from the stems.

LIFE CYCLE:

Winter or spring annual or biennial.

Seedlings that germinate in the fall, overwinter as a rosette and flower in early spring and produce seeds in early to mid-summer.

Seedlings that germinate in the spring, bloom in mid to late-summer and produce seeds in the early fall. After yielding seeds the plant dies back.

LEAF AND STEM:

Leaves are light green and divided in three deeply dissected leaflets. During the fall the leaves turn darker red.

Stems are forked and hairy. In sunny conditions its stems turn dark red.

FLOWER AND SEEDS (OR FRUIT):

Herb Robert has small, white to pink flowers. Each flower has five petals and ranges from .25-.40 inches (7-10 millimeters) wide.

Tiny brown seeds mature in capsules that pop when disturbed, scattering seeds nearby.

CLASSIFICATION

Common

Agricultural

Forest

REPORT:
Herb Robert is a common and widespread weed in Washington County and does not need to be reported.

RATINGS

STATE OF OREGON:	STATE OF WASHINGTON:	FOUR-COUNTY CWMA (Regional):
Class B	Class B	Class C

Tualatin Watershed Invasive Species Team (TWIST)
invasives@TualatinSWCD.org
(503) 334-2288
Weed & Pest Directory: www.TualatinSWCD.org/weed-pest-directory/

Tualatin Soil and Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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LOOK-ALIKES:



Bleeding heart.

Photo credit: (c) Gerald D. Carr, courtesy of OregonFlora



Bleeding heart flowers.

Photo credit: (c) Norman Jensen, courtesy of OregonFlora

DISTRIBUTION:

Herb Robert is widely distributed in western Oregon. In Washington County, it is a common weed in urbanized areas and natural spaces.

HABITAT:

Herb Robert can grow in a wide range of habitats but prefers moist soil. Gaps in forest understories, disturbed areas such as trails and roadsides, and gardens are common places for herb Robert to establish.

NATIVE RANGE AND HOW IT ARRIVED HERE:

Herb Robert is a common woodland species throughout most of Europe.

Traditionally, herb Robert was utilized as a medicine for numerous ailments such as toothaches and nosebleeds. It is believed to have escaped cultivation in the Pacific Northwest and spread to natural areas.

HOW IT SPREADS:

Herb Robert spreads entirely through seeds. Once the mature seed capsule has dried it ejects the seeds as far as 20 feet (6 meters) away.

Each capsule contains five seeds which have a sticky thread-like appendage that allows it to cling to animals, people, or vehicles. Flowing water and contaminated soil moved to new areas can also spread herb Robert. Seeds can stay viable in soil for at least 6 years.

WHAT IT THREATENS:

Native herbaceous forest understory species are displaced by herb Robert infestations. Its fast reproductive cycle and adaptability allow it to colonize a wide range of habitats quickly.

Areas where English ivy was recently removed are quickly occupied by herb Robert and shiny geranium - another common invasive species in the *Geraniaceae* family.

LOOK-ALIKES:

Bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*)

Native bleeding heart is a common understory species that grows in damp, shaded areas.

Its dissected leaves and purple flowers sometimes cause it to be confused with herb Robert. Bleeding heart's stems don't smell and stay green in sunny conditions whereas herb Robert's stems turn red. Bleeding heart's flowers have four petals and they hang in clusters.

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HOW CAN YOU CONTROL IT:

CULTURAL:

Sheet mulching is a good option for controlling smaller infestations. This is done by placing overlapping pieces of cardboard on top of the infestation and applying a layer of mulch 3-4 inches (7.5-10 centimeters) thick over the cardboard.

MANUAL:

Herb Robert can easily be pulled during the early spring when the ground is moist and before it sets seed. Its stems and shallow roots are brittle, so pull it from the base where the stems meet the soil. Monitor the area and repeat annually for several years until the seed bank is depleted.

Bag all plant materials in a tied plastic bag and dispose of it in the trash – not the yard debris.

Mowing of cutting it back with a string trimmer before it produces flowers is also an effective control method.

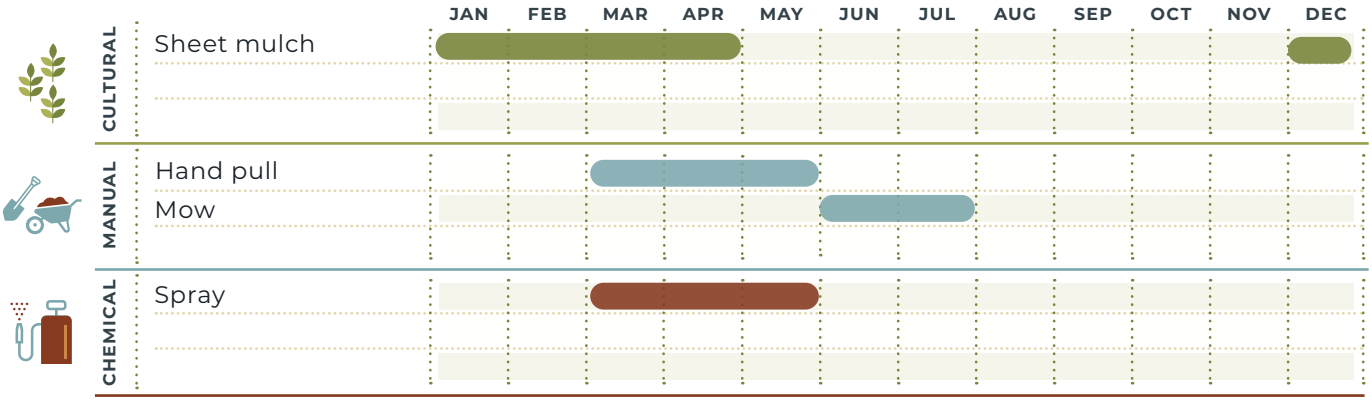
Refrain from pulling or mowing plants when seed pods have formed. Removing them in this stage may spread seeds to new areas.

BIOLOGICAL:

Currently, there are no approved biological control agents for herb Robert.

CHEMICAL:

For specific herbicide information, please contact the Tualatin SWCD Invasive Species Program at invasives@tualatinswcd.org.



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