



White Cockle

(Lychnis alba syn. Silene alba S. latifolia)

Provincial Designation: Noxious

Overview:

White cockle was introduced from Eurasia and is often confused with bladder campion (not hairy, not sticky) or night-flowering catchfly (hairy, upper stems sticky), white cockle is not sticky on any part of the plant. It is a short-lived perennial (sometimes biennial) native of Europe. Plants are either male or female, so not all plants produce seed.

Habitat:

White cockle prefers full-sun and rich, well-drained soils. Hayfields are a frequent habitat of this invasive plant – compounding the problem as weed seed gets distributed in baled forage.



Identification:

Stems: Stems are hairy, grow 30 to 120cm tall, and can be erect or spread laterally. There can be several stems per plant – crowded plants branch in the upper stems. Stems are swollen at the nodes.

Leaves: Leaves are opposite, hairy, and lance or slightly oval-shaped with pointed tips. Basal leaves and upper stem leaves are smaller.

Flowers: Flowers are numerous, fragrant and arranged in spreading clusters. The white (or pinkish) flowers have 5 notched petals and only open in the evening. The sticky, tubular calyx surrounds the flower's base. The calyx of the male flower has 10 veins, and the female's 20 veins are longer, and inflate with ripening.

Seed: The calyx matures into a fruit with 10 teeth at the tip containing many tiny, grayish seeds.



Prevention:

White cockle seeds are similar in size to clover and so is often a contaminant of forage seed.

Control:

White cockle can be a serious economic problem as its seeds are difficult to separate from alfalfa, clover and some grass crop seeds – and this invader is an extremely heavy seed producer. This plant emerges early spring, initially forms a taproot, and next spreading lateral roots.

Grazing: Not grazed. *Invasive plants should never be considered as forage.*

Cultivation: Stem and root pieces can sprout to form new plants; therefore cultivation will usually spread an infestation.

Mechanical: Frequent mowing will reduce seed production.

Chemical:¹ White cockle shows resistance to a number of herbicides, but early spring applications of dicamba offer some management. Consult your local Agricultural Fieldman or Certified Pesticide Dispenser for more information.

Biological: None researched to date.



¹ Always follow the product labels. The use of pesticides in any manner not published on the label or registered under the *Minor Use of Pesticides* regulation constitutes an offence under both the *Federal Pest Control Products Act* and *Alberta's Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*.