"B" Rated Weeds

A weed of economic importance which is regionally abundant, but may have limited distribution in some counties

Spiny cocklebur
Xanthium spinosum

Other common names: cocklebur

USDA symbol: XASP2
ODA rating: B

Introduction: Spiny cocklebur belongs to a family of highly adaptable plants in the sunflower family, this species being native to South America. It has a wide distribution throughout North America where is a nuisance plant in sheep producing areas, around farms and in annual cropped agriculture. It sports tough, peanut shaped seed burs covered in short, recurved spines. It has been said that the bur provided the inspiration for the development of Velcro.

Distribution: Spiny cocklebur can be found growing in many western and eastern Oregon counties. It generally doesn't grow to any great density and is more of an incidental nuisance in agricultural areas.

spiny cocklebur

- Widespread
- Limited
- Historical site
- Not known to occur

Oregon Department of Agriculture

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State of Oregon Geospatial Enterprise Office (GEO)

Description: The plant is a well armored summer annual growing 3-4 feet tall. The leaves covered with short white hairs, white-veined above, 1 to 3 inches long and have 2 short lobes and a 3-forked spine at the junction with the stem. Male flowers are segregated from the female by being located in the uppermost parts of the plant and clustered. Female flowers are below male flowers and form a beaked bur that bears many small hooked bristles.

Impacts: Spiny cocklebur is most frequently found in highly disturbed waste areas and barnyards. It surrounds many small reservoirs in Oregon. The burs of spiny cocklebur can become tangled in the hide or wool of livestock adding to the cost of the woolen product. It is moderately competitive and is a nuisance in hand-harvested crops. The seeds and seedlings of spiny cocklebur are poisonous. The symptoms are anorexia, depression, nausea, and prostration. Death may occur in a few hours to three days after the symptoms are first noted.

Biological controls: No approved biological control agent is available.

Photos by Jed Colquhoun, Oregon State University, Ken French ODA