

Prickly Lettuce

Lactuca serriola L.

Alternate names

wild lettuce, compass plant, milk thistle, horse thistle, wild opium

Synonyms

L. scariola L.

Description

Prickly lettuce is a biennial plant with a pappus of simple bristles. Stem leaves lack a clasping base. Stem leaves lack a clasping base. Achenes are beak-shaped. Plants are 2–4 feet tall from a large taproot. Stems branch only in the flowering portion and bear numerous yellow flowerheads. Prickles cover the leaf teeth, the back side of the midvein, and the lower half of the stem. Leaves are twisted at the base to lie in a vertical plane, clasping the stem with two ear-like lobes.

Similar Species

Prickly lettuce can be differentiated from several similar species in Alaska by its prominent prickles along the underside of the leaf mid-vein, which the others lack.

Management

Isolated individuals can be dug up or pulled by hand.

Notes

Cultivated lettuce also belongs to this genus, of which there are over 100 species, but only a few of them are native to the Americas. Another common name for prickly lettuce is compass plant, because the bluish-green leaves often twist slightly at their clasping base so that they mainly



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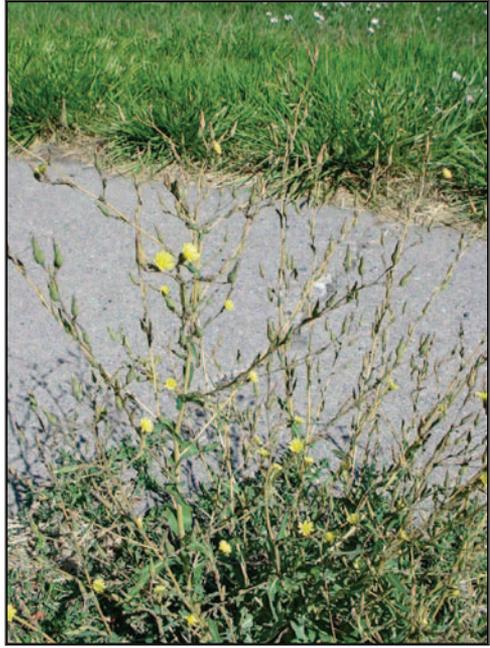
Family: Asteraceae

Prickly Lettuce

face east and west, their edges pointing approximately north and south.



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