

# Western Salsify



*Tragopogon dubius* Scop.

## Alternate names

yellow salsify

## Synonyms

*Tragopogon dubius* Scop. ssp.  
*major* (Jacq.), *Tragopogon*  
*major* Jacq.

## Description

Western salsify is a large, taprooted biennial plant that grows 1–3 feet high. All parts of the plant contain a milky white juice. Leaves are up to 12 inches long, clasping, alternate, narrow, grass-like, somewhat fleshy, hairless, and light green to bluish-green. Flowerheads, composed of yellow ray florets, measure 1–2½ inches across and form at the end of long, hollow stalks. There are 10–14 bracts subtending each head that are 1–2 inches long and extend beyond the ray florets. Leaves from the previous year are often found at the base of the plant. The fruiting head of western salsify is globe-shaped, 2½–4 inches across, and composed of pappus-bearing achenes.

## Similar Species

Western salsify seedlings can be mistaken for small grass plants. Meadow salsify (*T. pratensis* L.), found throughout Canada, does not have a swollen stem below the flowerhead and has 8 or 9 floral



USDA Forest Service photo by Dave Powell,  
image 1205020 ([www.invasive.org](http://www.invasive.org))



XID Services photo by Richard Old

## Family: Asteraceae

## Western Salsify

bracts below the flower. No other yellow-flowered composites with milky juice in Alaska have long, narrow bracts or grow as tall as western salsify.

### Ecological Impact

Western salsify establishes in sparse herbaceous communities and creates a new vegetation layer. High densities of plants are likely to inhibit growth and recruitment of native forbs and grasses. This species is unpalatable to grazing animals and attractive to many types of pollinating insects (M. Carlson, pers. comm. 2004).

### Biology and Invasive Potential

Western salsify reproduces only by seed. Each plant is capable of producing up to 500 seeds (Royer and Dickinson 1999). It occurs in disturbed sites, including steep slopes and landslides, and can also establish in intact to moderately grazed prairies in Oregon. Seeds have pappus composed of feathery, webbed hairs that are easily and widely dispersed by wind (Royer and Dickinson 1999). This species is a potential seed contaminant (GRIN 2004) and is known as a contaminant in seed mixes for road construction. Western salsify is adapted to pH levels ranging from 6.5 to 7.5 and to all soil textures. It has low fertility and moisture requirements. It is shade-intolerant and withstands temperatures to  $-28^{\circ}\text{F}$ . It does not require cold-stratification for germination (GRIN 2004). Western salsify is listed as an invasive weed in Kentucky, Nebraska, Tennessee, Manitoba, and Ontario.

### Distribution and Abundance

Western salsify is native to Eurasia and has become established over much of temperate North America. It has been



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collected from only one site in southcentral Alaska, along Turnagain Arm between Anchorage and Girdwood (ALA 2004). Thousands of plants are now found in this area. Outside of Alaska, it is a common weed of cultivated crops, roadsides, and waste areas.

**Management**

According to Rutledge and McLendon (1996), western salsify is not an aggressive weed and control is seldom necessary. However, in southcentral Alaska, multiple years of hand-pulling have been unsuccessful for eradication.

**Notes**

Western salsify was introduced from Europe for its large, edible roots. Other common names include oysterplant, goatsbeard, noonflower, and Jerusalem star. Noonflower refers to the showy flowers that open in the morning and close by noon.



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