

Foxglove

Digitalis purpurea L.

Alternate Names

Purple foxglove

Description

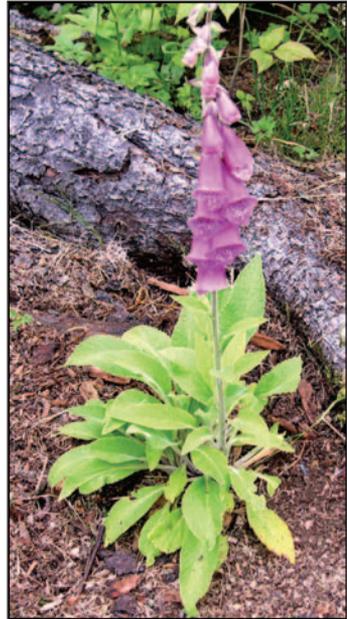
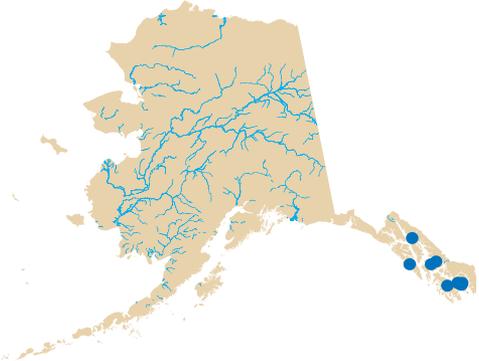
Foxglove is a biennial plant that grows 2–5 feet tall and unbranched. Leaves are soft, hairy, toothed, and lance- to egg-shaped. Basal leaves are up to 12 inches long. Flowers are bell-shaped, very showy, purple with purple mottling on the inside, and borne on a spike. Most foxglove cultivars have flowers arranged on one side of the spike.

Similar Species

It would be difficult to mistake a native Alaskan plant for foxglove. There are a couple of *Penstemon* species of the same family whose ranges may barely extend into eastern interior Alaska, but their flowers are smaller and bluer than those of foxglove.

Management

Hand-pulling can effectively control foxglove. Herbicides are more effective on large infestations. Control efforts must continue for at least 5 years with site monitoring for at least 10 years due to a long-lived seed-bank. Biological controls have not been developed due to the species' horticultural value (Harris 2000). First-year rosettes do not survive interior Alaska winters and usually do not survive southcentral Alaska winters (J. Riley, pers. comm. 2005).



USDA Forest Service photo by Tom Heutte

Notes

Foxglove is common in communities throughout southeast Alaska, where it is a popular garden plant that has escaped from cultivation. Potential ecological effects are not known, but it has been observed forming dense stands along roadsides and vacant lots. This plant is the source of the cardiac drug digitalin, which makes the plant highly poisonous. The earliest known name for this plant is the Anglo-Saxon “foxes glofa” (the glove of the fox). The name is derived from the shape of the flowers, which resemble the fingers of a glove, or possibly from a northern legend that bad fairies gave the blossoms to the fox to put on his toes, so that he might soften his tread while he hunted for prey.



USDA Forest Service photo by Tom Heutte

Bell-shaped flowers of foxglove.