

School-to-Nature



Burdock

Burdock is a biennial weed, meaning that it has a two-year life cycle. In the first year, the very large elephant-ear leaves emerge. The second year the plant grows to about 3 feet tall, and purple fuzzy flowers appear. When the flowers dry, the seeds form as a small ball of little spines that can catch on clothing or animal fur. The spines have small hooks that attach easily to whatever they brush against. Burdock was originally native to northern Europe and Siberia and has spread to most of the U.S. On Conservancy lands it grows any place where the land has been disturbed, near the ponds, or in woods edges.

Because the sticky burdock seed balls can get stuck to humans and pets, most people get rid of Burdock. It is best to dig it up in the first year of growth, because the roots become huge. If you don't remove Burdock the first year, make sure to cut off the flowers or the seed heads and put them in the trash so they do not reseed.

Burdock roots have been used as food and medicine for hundreds of years. They can be eaten raw or cooked. The root is very low in cholesterol, but high in potassium, minerals, and vitamins. Potassium helps control heart rate and blood pressure, so if you plan to eat a lot of Burdock roots, check with your doctor first.

In the 1940's a man from Switzerland named George de Maestral, an inventor, took a closer look at the seed balls of burdock and was amazed at their sticking power; he experimented and came up with something we use almost daily, VELCRO. This invention, taken directly from nature, has changed the world!

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