

Xanthium strumarium

Common cocklebur, kikānia

Xanthium strumarium L.

Family: Asteraceae

Description: Semiwoody shrub to 6 ft tall, somewhat hairy. Leaves broad to kidney-shaped, 3 inches long by 4 inches wide, margins toothed. Flower heads few to numerous in axils. Burs covered with hooked prickles topped by 2 beaks. Capable of setting seed without fertilization. A difficult genus to sort out taxonomically. Greek *xanthos*, yellow, the color of the sap of the cockleburs, which the ancient Greeks used to dye hair; *strumarium*, swelling or tumor, for which cocklebur was a treatment^(19, 26, 41, 70).

Distribution: Origin obscure, long thought to be Old World^(17, 41) but probably New World according to Wagner et al.⁽⁷⁰⁾, now widespread globally. In Hawai'i, occurs at low elevations in dry, disturbed areas on all the main islands. Naturalized prior to 1871⁽⁷⁰⁾.

Environmental impact: A weed of temperate and subtropical zones in crops. Burs in wool a quality problem for ranchers. Seed and seedlings poisonous to livestock⁽²⁹⁾. An extensive root system and rapid growth rate make these plants strong competitors with desirable forages and crops⁽⁶¹⁾.



Management: Sensitive to dicamba and metsulfuron. Clopyralid, 2,4-D, glyphosate, triclopyr also effective⁽³⁶⁾. Australian officials have imposed strict quarantines to keep uninfested areas clear of this weed. Small infestations may be effectively cleared by hand pulling or hoeing with care to collect, remove, and burn any burs. Controlled burning may also be effective on larger areas. Several biocontrol insects and pathogens have been introduced in Australia with variable results⁽⁶¹⁾.