



Weed Information Sheet:

American burnweed

Erechtites hieracifolia

AKA: fireweed, pilewort, butterweed, *Senecio hieraciifolius*

Asteraceae (Aster Family)

Identification:

Uncommon Annual **forb**

Height: 24-96" **Width:** 12-24"

Leaf Arrangement: alternate

Flower: Cream, Green

Blooms: Late-summer

Fruit: Fluffy

Fall Color: n/a

This species emerges as a lettuce-like rosette in late spring (Photo 3). It quickly bolts with a dominant central stalk and many branches sprouting upward at sharp angles from the main stem. Leaves vary in size, larger at the bottom and small near the top of the plant, but all but the smallest have irregular sharp serrations with the largest leaves often developing shallow lobes.

The flower is unremarkable (Photo 2), when in full bloom you may think it is still in bud, but upon closer examination you can see small stamen and stigmas sticking out of the top. Once seeds develop a fluffy white paupus is released from the top of the inflorescence (Photo 1), indeed this plant may be most conspicuous in fall when it is in fruit. Flowering does not happen all at once, some inflorescences may have already matured while others are in bloom.

When crushed, all parts of the plant release an herby odor which can distinguish it from found in similar looking plants such as the wild lettuces. The fresh young leaves are edible and it and other species in the same genus have been used in traditional medicine.



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RED HEAD Ecological Consulting

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Habitat:

Woodlands and wetlands after disturbance. Sometimes found in wet or shady gardens.



Description & Impact:

This annual is most frequent after disturbances. As its name implies, it frequently sprouts after a wildland fire. Logging, invasive brush removal, and grazing can promote seed germination by exposing bare soil to sunlight. It may sprout in small numbers, fitting in amongst existing vegetation, or it may come up in seemingly alarming numbers, especially in areas where there is not well-established perennial vegetation to compete with it. In wetlands, large-scale invasive plant control efforts or water level drops, such as when a beaver dam is removed, can cause an explosion of this species on newly exposed wet soil. However, this species is simply responding to the disturbance, and doing more good than harm in that its stabilizing the site after these disturbances in the absence of longer lived species.

In a garden setting, consider that this species is stabilizing the soil with its roots, and taking up growing space that could be filled by much worse weeds.

Flowers provide nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies and wasps. A handful of insects feed on the foliage. Deer and cattle avoid browsing on this plant due the strong odor/taste. Despite this, the fresh young leaves are edible. It and other species in the same genus have been used in traditional medicine.

Control Methods:

In most cases control is not necessary as this species will become less abundant with time after disturbance. In a garden setting they can simply be hand-pulled as they are weak rooted. If you suspect they are inhibiting seeding efforts, they could be mowed. Applying herbicide to this beneficial weed would cause more harm then benefit.

Citations: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erechtites_hieracifolius
Photo 3 Credit: Marie Viljoen, <https://www.gardenista.com/posts/american-burnweed-recipes/>
<https://m.illinoiswildflowers.info/weeds/plants/pilewort.htm>
<https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/pilewort>

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