It looks as if Johnny Appleseed’s cousin, Johnny-go-to-bed-at-noon, has been spraying fertilizers on dandelions. However, this plant is really a Salsify or Goatbeard (*Tragopogon* spp.). There are several species of salsify in Indiana, with Western Salsify (*T. dubius* Scop.) and Meadow Salsify (*T. pratensis* L.) being the most common. Western Salsify is native to Europe and Northern Africa and brought to North America as a garden vegetable for its carrot like taproot and “oystery taste”. Since then it has spread to roadsides, old abandoned fields, no-till field, pastures and other undisturbed areas.

**Biology:**

Western Salsify is a dicot species that requires at least two years (biennial to short lived perennial) to produce seed. In the first year of growth leaves develop into a basal rosette that is often mistaken for a grass (Figure 2). The basal rosette has multiple long, narrow, parallel veined leaves that taper to a kneeled or pointed tip.
Bolting (stem growth) will eventually occur when a minimum rosette size is reached. The time to reach this criteria can range from a year to upwards of 10 years. At bolting time a smooth, round, erect stem is initiated with long, linear, grass-like leaves (8-12”) clasping to it. These leaves may or may not contain cobweb-like hairs (Figure 3).
Is This a Giant Dandelion?  

Once bolting has occurred, an inflorescence (flower head) is borne onto a single stem. Yellow ray flowers begin to bloom in the early summer months of April, May or June. Flower bracts (small leaves at the base of the flower) surpass flowers in length and continue to elongate (Figure 4); however, in Meadow Salsify bracts do not extend past the petals. As the plants mature, large achenes (fruits) with a pappus (seed feather) attached will develop, similar to dandelion. The pappus aids in wind dispersal of seeds.

![Figure 4. Western salsify flower.](image)

Keys to Identification:

- Large dandelion like white puff ball seed head
- Excretes milky sap when broken
- Grass-like leaves

Management:

Western Salsify is rarely a problem in crops, but can be in pastures. Early control of the basal rosette before bolting is suggested. Rosette size has been highly correlated with survivability and flowering success in the following years. Seeds of Western Salsify have little dormancy or low persistence in the seedbank. Tillage, hand pulling, mowing and/or grazing are feasible control methods. Little information is available for chemical control of Western Salsify. Recommendations of growth regulator products that contain picloram (Tordon), clopyralid (Stinger) or dicamba (Banvel, Clarity) have shown to be effective. The use of 2,4-D has shown varying results but will provide suppression. Depending on the situation and level of infestation hand pulling is what I would recommend for small areas infested with Western Salsify.
Is This a Giant Danadelion? 

June 15, 2010

Sources:


