

Creeping Bellflower (*Campanula rapunculoides*)

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**Exotic
 Invasive**

DESCRIPTION:

Creeping bellflower was introduced to North America from Eurasia as an ornamental plant and frequently escapes from gardens. It reproduces by extensive creeping underground roots called rhizomes as well as by seeds. Each plant can produce 3,000 to 15,000 seeds annually which can be dispersed long distances by wind. It can grow in full sun to full shade and its aggressive spreading behavior allows it to form dense patches that can quickly crowd out diverse native vegetation. It is notable that this species is extremely difficult to eradicate, neither chemical or physical control methods are completely effective. Diligent management over several years is necessary to control this species.

IDENTIFICATION:

Creeping bellflower is most easily identified by its bright blue to purple nodding bell-shaped flowers and purplish, erect stem that are 2-4' tall. Blooms appear from June through August. The lower leaves are heart shaped while the upper leaves are lance shaped and hairy underneath. The basal leaves can be found throughout the growing season and look very much like the leaves of violets and some native asters. When cut or broken creeping bellflower releases a milky juice. This species may be confused with the native American bellflower (*Campanula americana*) as both species have blue/indigo flowers with five petals. However, American bellflower has a more open, star-shaped flower.

CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Creeping bellflower can be cut close to the ground immediately after flowering to prevent seed production. In order to kill this plant you must remove all of the root system. This is very difficult to eliminate by digging due to the fact that even the smallest root piece is capable of regenerating. We recommend using a shovel to dig out the entire area around the plant and turning the soil over and sifting out both the bulbous root sections (which are edible) and the thinner horizontal runners. This will need to be repeated as new leaves resprout from root fragments that you missed. Using a small trowel to dig individual plants typically only removes a portion of the root.

Chemical: A foliar application of glyphosate (Roundup®, etc.) will top-kill the plant and likely kill some of the root mass, but will require several treatments since the plant will resprout from the extensive root system. Chemical treatment is best either in early spring or late fall when other native plants are dormant to minimize collateral damage. Studies have shown that creeping bellflower is tolerant of many broad-leaf specific herbicides. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use. We have begun experimenting with a mix of glyphosate and Milestone® herbicide in hopes of finding a method for more effective long-term control.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

A few possibilities for shade include spring blooming species such as wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*), wild columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), May apple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), woodland phlox (*Phlox divaricata*), Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginiana*), great white trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) and Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*). Species which add summer color include tall bellflower (*Campanula americana*), starry campion (*Silene stellata*), doll's eyes (*Actea pachypoda*) and red baneberry (*Actea rubra*). Fall blooming species include zig-zag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*), elm-leaved goldenrod (*S. ulmifolia*) and various woodland asters (*Aster* spp.)

