



Relationship #3



A critical phase in the life cycle of plants is the proper dispersal of its seeds. Many wonderful or strange adaptations have evolved to ensure this dispersal. One of these adaptations is the evolution of recurved spines on the seeds or seedpods to attach the seeds to the fur of passing vertebrates who carry the seeds away from the parent plant. In the case of humans, fur is replaced by pants, sweaters, socks, and other pieces of clothing. Plants, therefore, anticipated the invention of velcro from several million years. The plant benefits from the relationship by the dispersal of its seeds. The vertebrates are not affected except, perhaps, by being annoyed.

One of the most famous examples are the burdocks, common weeds found along roadsides and in empty lots and fields. The species on the left is the Great Burdock (*Arctium lappa*). The seed heads (burs) of burdocks long spines with hooked tips. The hooked tips catch onto the hair of passing vertebrates (cows, deer, dogs, humans) and the burs are carried elsewhere until they finally drop off or are pulled off by the carriers.

Similar structures have evolved in other many other plant groups.