Twenty Weeds to Know in...

Douglas County Washington

Produced by the South Douglas Conservation District

Purpose of this Booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to help producers and land managers identify known or potential weed species and to present options for control and/or eradication of non-desireable plant species.

What is a weed anyway?

A weed is a plant out of place not intentionally sown, whose undesirable qualities outweigh its good points. Some crop plants even can become weeds when they grow where they are not wanted. In contrast, a number of plants usually thought of as weeds may actually be helpful in controlling erosion or serving as food for wild animals and birds. The definition of a "weed" is all in the eye of the beholder and may change over time.

A "noxious weed" is a traditional and legal term for invasive plants that are so aggressive they out compete native plants to harm our ecosystems or disrupt agricultural production. Noxious weeds are non-native plants introduced to Washington State and can be difficult to control. These plants invade our croplands, rangeland, forests, parks, rivers, lakes, wetlands and gardens.

In Washington State, three classes of Noxious weeds are recognized.

Class A Weeds: Distribution is still limited. Preventing new infestation and eradicating any present is a high priority and required by law.

Class B Weeds: Non-native species presently limited to portions of the State. Control is normally emphasized at the local level.

Class C Weeds: Noxious weeds that are typically widespread throughout the State or are of special interest to the agriculture industry. Control at the local level.

Nuisance Weeds: Not of great concern – low impact on ecology or economy. More common in gardens and lawns than in crops.

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Thank you to Kristine Degroseillier, formerly of Foster Creek Conservation District, now of Cascadia CD for her help on this project.

Resources

Weeds of the West – Tom D Whitson

Biological Control of Invasive Plants in the United States – Eric M Combs, J Clark, G Piper, A Cofrancesco

Weeds of Eastern Washington – Xerpha M Gaines

Photos on the Web (or search for specific plant)

Plants Database: www.plants.usda.gov
Washington Noxious Weed Control Board: www.nwcb.wa.gov

Bulbous Bluegrass

Poa bulbosa

Identification

Bulbous bluegrass, also known as winter bluegrass, is now considered a weedy species but until the mid-1900s was commonly used as a grass for turf, erosion control and pasture. This short lived perennial is a cool-season grass and the only grass known to have true bulbs. Flowers are modified to bulbets with a base that is dark purple. Although dormant during the warmer months, the leaves emerge when the weather cools. Bulbous bluegrass can grow to a height of 6 to 24 inches. Its few short blades are flat, narrow or loosely rolled.

Impact

Nuisance Weed. This grass is known to move from disturbed sites to nearby hay and crop fields. Reproducing via bulbs in addition to seeds allows rapid spread even in hostile environments. Juvenile plants develop from bulbets while still on the adult plant and then drop off ready to establish themselves.

Control

Bulbous bluegrass is easily controlled with early season cultivation with equipment such as spiketooth harrow and herbicides for grass control. Haying and mowing for control of bulbous bluegrass is not recommended due to the short height (below cutting height) of this plant. For control within crop fields, rotating with a spring crop or permanent pasture may be beneficial. Grazing and spraying may also be beneficial with guidance from experienced personnel such as a NRCS Range Specialist or WSU Extension agent.

Photo Courtesy Wikimedia

Photo Courtesy Slichter

Photo Courtesy Wikimedia

Canada Thistle

Cirsium arvense

Identification

Canada thistle forms dense perennial colonies from its extensive deep and creeping horizontal root system. This thistle can spread up to 12 feet by rootstock in a single system. Roots can be viable up to five years underground. Stems can be from 1 to 4 feet tall, ridged and branching with alternate, oblong or lanced shaped leaves. Very spiny, the flowers occur in bristly clusters approximately ½ inch in diameter, ranging from light lavender to deep rose purple. Each flower head can produce 40-80 seeds.

Impact

Class C Noxious Weed. Due to Canada thistle being dioecious and having male or female plants on different plants, this weed is able to sustain colonies and reproduce asexually. Once established, control of this aggressive weed is very difficult. Canada thistle is often seen in pastures, fields and damp areas. In heavy concentrations, this weed effectively prevents grazing, and reduces a site's potential to support livestock.

Photo courtesy Mel Harte

Control

Selective herbicide application to basal leaves upon emergence is one control strategy. Biocontrol insects are also available.

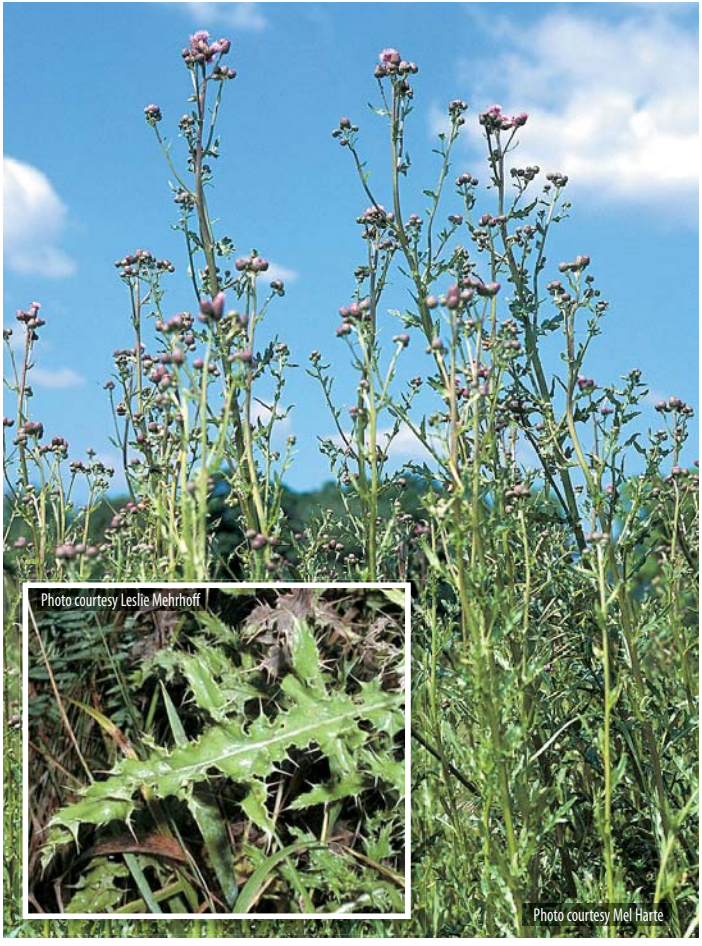


Photo courtesy Leslie Mehrhoff

Photo courtesy Mel Harte

Cheat Grass

Bromus tectorum

Identification

Cheat grass, or downy brome, is an annual that grows 4 to 30 inches tall and reproduces by seed. Like the name suggests, leaf sheaths and flat blades are densely covered with soft hair that is “downy.” Each plant has one to several erect but bent stems bearing abundant spikelet that are nodding, slender and about 3/4 inches long. Awns are about 1/2 inch long and usually purple at maturity.

Impact

Nuisance Weed. Cheat grass was introduced from the Mediterranean region in packing material, and first found in Colorado in the late 1800s. Now throughout North America, it is common in range and pastureland, roadsides, waste areas and crop lands. Although it is thought of as an invader, it is widely foraged by livestock when young. However, the plant does compete with more desirable perennial grasses for moisture because of its winter and early spring growing patterns. It readily invades bare ground from fire damage or other disturbances. After maturity, cheat grass becomes a nuisance and fire hazard. Cheat grass seed is a troublesome crop seed contaminant and very difficult to separate from grass seed. The bracts of cheatgrass may be caught in the mouths of horses and cattle and cause infection. Most likely it is the seed stuck in your sock that you can never quite find.

Control

Cheat grass may respond to select herbicide applications. Proper grazing and pasture management is also an important preventative tool.


Photo courtesy
Leslie Mehrhoff


Photo courtesy
Steve Dewey

Common Mullein

Verbascum thapsus

Identification

This biennial has thick, fuzzy leaves that form a rosette its first year. The second year produces a stout, single, upright stem reach up to six feet in height. The leaves are alternate, overlapping one another, light green and densely wooly. Flowers are yellow, five lobed, 1/2 to 3/4 inches wide, crowded into a 2 to 16 inch long spike-like cluster at the top of the stem.


Photo courtesy Wikimedia

Impact

Nuisance Weed. Common mullein is not an overly aggressive weed and reproduces by seed. After shedding their seeds, the mullein skeletons remain standing and visible across the landscape. Mullein is most commonly found in disturbed areas such as roadsides.

Control

Select herbicide application and biocontrol insects are recommended.


Photo courtesy Wikimedia


Photo courtesy Bundh

Curly Dock

Rumix crispus

Identification

Curly dock, a perennial broadleaf plant, stands erect and grows 2-6 feet. A member of the buckwheat family, the plant has a characteristic membranous sheath at the leaf base and usually swollen stem joints. Leaves are hairless and alternate to one another along the stem. The fruiting stem dies back in mid to late summer and the fruits and leaves turn a distinctive rusty brown. Flowers are visible nearly year-round. The flowering stem is loosely branched and green, non-showy flowers cluster along its upper portion in a whorl. The fruits are covered with a papery, three winged membrane with veins. It reproduces primarily by seed.

Impact

Nuisance Weed. With its long tap root, it outcompetes more desirable plants for water and nutrients. The seed stalks have been used in flower arrangements, further distributing the seeds. Some alfalfa hay fields have large patches of Curly Dock. A cupful of seeds in the manger after feeding is possible. The plants can accumulate soluble oxalates, making them toxic to livestock.

Control

Dig curly dock out by the large, tuberous root. Ripe brown seed tops, should be cut off and placed in the garbage. If the plant has dropped seed in the area, new plants will germinate for years to come. Dig seedlings. Careful herbicide application when the plant is young and actively growing will give best chemical control.

Dalmatian Toadflax

Linaria dalmatica

Identification

Dalmatian toadflax is a very showy perennial growing 2-4 feet tall. It has waxy light green heart-shaped leaves that clasp the stem. The flowers are a bright yellow and similar to snapdragons with an orange or purplish throat and long spur. A native of Southeast Europe, it was brought to America as an ornamental but escaped and became weedy.

Impact

Class B Noxious Weed. Highly competitive with extensive root systems and prolific seed producing capabilities. A mature toadflax can produce up to 500,000 seeds per plant. The seeds remain viable in the soil for up to ten years. Dalmatian toadflax, like many weeds, is found in disturbed sites along roads, in pastures, rangelands and natural areas where they outcompete with native and desirable species. Once established, this toadflax can form dense monocultures.

Control

Dalmatian toadflax and its relative, yellow toadflax *(Linaria vulgaris)*, are difficult to control. Small infestations can be hand pulled and if done consistently for 5-6 years may prove effective. Selective herbicide application in the spring or fall can also provide control. Biological control insects such as the stem-boring weevil, *Mecinus janthinus*, have been shown to provide considerable control on large infestations. For large infestations the Conservation Districts' recommendation is to release large numbers of biological control insects and to keep the weed patch contained with herbicide border sprays applied annually.

Photos Courtesy Utah State University

Diffuse Knapweed

Centaurea diffusa

Identification

Diffuse knapweed is a biennial with pineapple shaped purple to white flowers and small spines covering the base of the flower. Flowers occur at the end of the branches. This knapweed can grow 40 inches tall and possesses a long tap root.

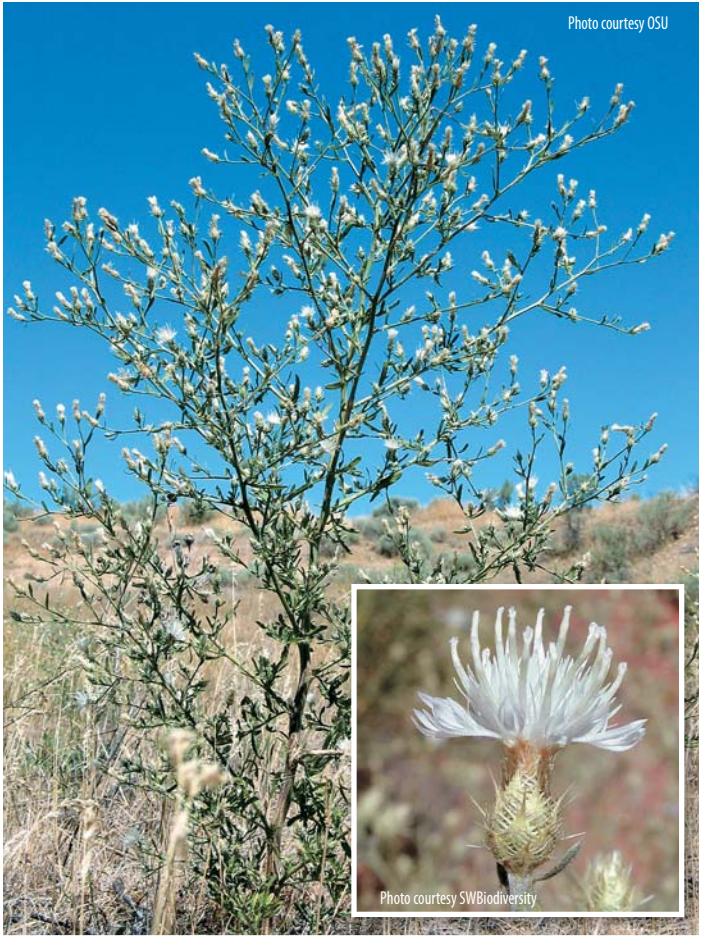
Impact

Class B Noxious Weed. While diffuse knapweed produces mainly by seeds (1200 per plant), it can also regenerate from the crown. This knapweed produces an allopathic chemical that inhibits the growth of neighboring plants leading to quick invasion of nearby areas, decreasing suitable forage for livestock and wildlife.

Control

Preventing these prolific seeders from going to seed is critical for control. Hand pulling or digging can be effective for small batches but mowing is not a good option due to the tap roots resprouting. Tilling and planting competitive species can help drive out diffuse knapweed. For large infestations, both selective herbicides and biological control insects have been shown to be effective control measures.

The Conservation Districts are currently working with four bioagents for knapweed control. These include seed eating beetles: *Larinus minutis* and *Bangastemus fausti*, along with seed gall flies: *Urophora affinia* and *U. quadrifasciasta*.



Field Bindweed

Convolvulus arvensis

Identification

Field Bindweed, or Morning Glory, is a perennial vine that trails along the ground or can climb on other plants or fences. The leaves are ovate from 1/2 to 1 3/4 inches long, pointed or rounded at the tip. Flowers are funnel-shaped and pink or white. The heavy cord-like roots spread through the soil at different depths and send up new plants, forming dense colonies.

Impact

Class C Noxious Weed. Present over much of North America, it is estimated that on rich farm land heavily infested with bindweed, the weight of the roots of the weed may run into tons per acre. Field bindweed is one of the most persistent and difficult-to-control weeds in landscapes and agricultural crops. Its seed has a long dormancy and can last in soil for up to 60 years. It has a climbing habit that allows the plant to grow upward. In addition, its rhizomes have the ability to penetrate through fabric, plastic, and other barriers. Field bindweed also is very drought tolerant, and grows readily in the wheat fields of Douglas County.

Control

Control is difficult and cannot be accomplished with a single treatment or in a single season. Effective control requires prevention of seed production, competition for light from other plants and constant vigilance in removing top growth. Application of herbicides, which reduce bindweed growth and kill germinating seedlings, can also be beneficial. *Aceria malherbae*, a gall mite, is a biological control.

Hoary Cress

Cardaria draba

Identification

Also known as White Top, this perennial grows up to 2 feet tall, reproducing from root segments and seeds. Leaves are blue-green in color and lanced shaped. Lower leaves are stalked, upper leaves have two lobes clasping the stem. Plants have many white flowers with four petals, giving the plant a white flat-topped appearance. Heart shaped seed capsules contain two reddish-brown seeds. Plants emerge in very early spring, and have bloomed and set seed by mid-summer.

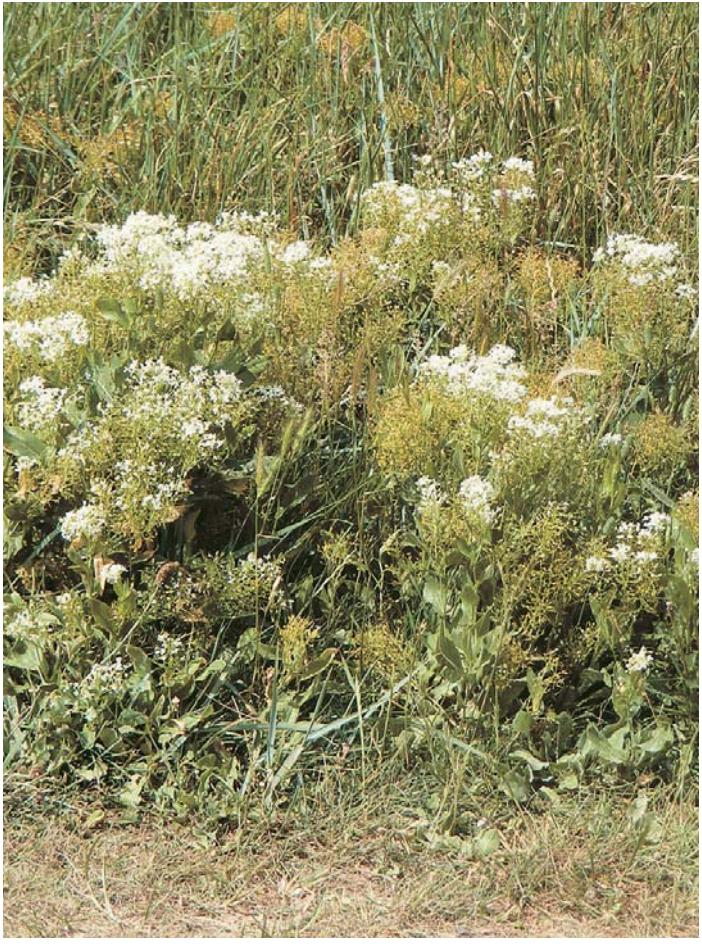
Impact

Class C Noxious Weed. Common in alkaline, disturbed soils, it is highly competitive with other species once established. Invading pasturelands, it is unpalatable to livestock. Widespread in fields, waste places, meadows, pastures, croplands and along roadsides. In the absence of competition, a single plant can spread over an area 12 feet in diameter in a single year.


Photo courtesy
Chris Evens

Control

Commonly controlled with herbicides and less commonly by mowing, management is difficult because of the perennial root system, abundant seed production, and diverse habitats of the plant.



Houndstongue

Cynoglossum officinale

Identification

This biennial plant has narrow elliptical leaves that resemble a dog's tongue. The lower leaves of this weed can reach up to a foot in length and the upper leaves are smaller and lack stalks. The leaves are 1 to 3 inches wide, rough, hairy and are not toothed or lobed. The plant's flowers are dull reddish purple, about 3/8 inches wide and five lobed on short stalks along one side of the curved flowering branch. Growing up to 4 feet high it reproduces from seeds. The seeds are covered by tiny spines that attach to clothes, fur and hair facilitating the spread of this weed. This plant is often found in pastures, disturbed habitats and along roadsides.

Impact

Class B Noxious Weed. Houndstongue is toxic to livestock, particularly horses, and can cause liver damage. The seeds are an irritant to cattle. Infested rangeland is less marketable for recreation and livestock uses.

Houndstongue is on the watch list for Douglas County. Contact your local Conservation District or WSU extension for assistance if you spot a plant.

Control

Due to the toxicity and irritating nature of this weed, ranges and pastures should be maintained to encourage production of high quality forage and grasses. Hand pull or dig up this weed before it produces seed. Clipping flower heads before they produce seeds can be effective. Do not overgraze. Re-seed problem areas with quick growing grasses.

Jointed Goatgrass

Aegilops cylindrical

Identification

Jointed goatgrass is a problematic winter annual that is able to hybridize with winter wheat and reduce wheat crop yields. This weed may have one to many erect stems or tillers that are 15 to 30 inches tall. Flat leaves are alternate with long hairs on the sheath and 1/8 to 1/4 inches wide. Jointed goatgrass stems are hollow and tipped with slender, cylindrical seed heads that break apart and spread during the summer months. Flowers of jointed goatgrass are narrow, nonspreading spikes that look like a series of joints stacked one on top of another. Each joint has two to six flowers.

Impact

Class C Noxious Weed. The weed is now established in most winter wheat growing areas of North America, including Douglas County, and is commonly spread by combines or as a seed contaminant. While found mainly in wheat fields, jointed goatgrass also survives on roadsides and in alfalfa fields, pastures and waste areas.

Control

Jointed goatgrass is most difficult to control where winter wheat is cultivated continuously. Most wheat in Douglas County is planted one year and the field lies fallow the next. Preventing invasion of this weed into wheat fields and other areas should be a priority. Combines cannot separate the wheat from the goatgrass, so it becomes a problem at the mill. Prevention of seed production, crop rotation at least every two years and control of small populations should be focused on. New seedling plants should be killed with tillage before the wheat is planted.

Photo courtesy OSU

Kochia

Kochia scoparia

Identification

Kochia is a summer annual introduced from Eurasia as an ornamental that escaped cultivation. Kochia's many branched stems grow 3 to 8 feet tall. The stems are often tinged with red, especially in autumn. The hairy leaves are alternate, with 3 or 5 prominent veins. Flowers are inconspicuous, forming dense spikes in leaf axils.

Impact

Class B Noxious Weed. Common in cultivated fields, gardens, roadsides, ditchbanks and waste areas throughout the western United States. Considered an objectionable weed, it is readily grazed by livestock. It sometimes contains high nitrate levels and can be toxic. Flowering and seed production occur from July to October.

Control

Mowing or slashing the plants before flowering is effective in reducing seed production. Early tillage in the spring can control the seedlings. Selective herbicide applications is also effective.


Photo courtsey Russ Kleinman


Photo courtesy Doug Barbe

Photo courtesy Erin McDermott

Prickly Lettuce

Lactuca serriola

Identification

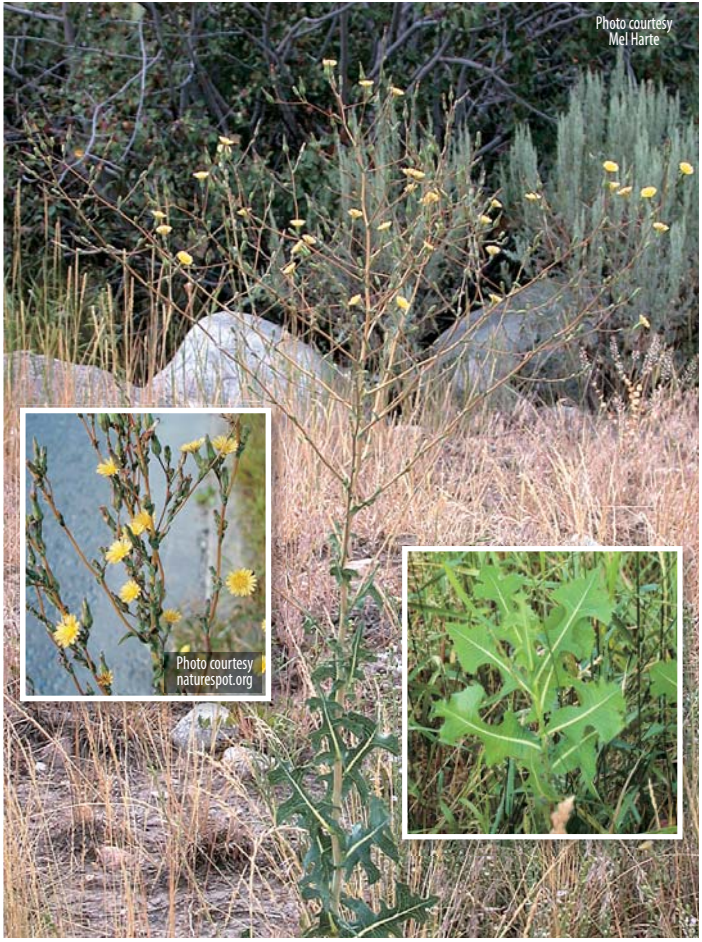
Formerly called China lettuce, the leaves have a tendency to point north and south, giving rise to another common name, compass plant. It is a winter annual or biennial plant with bitter, milky juice growing 1 to 5 feet tall, branched above, stem prickly near the base, smooth above. The leaves are alternate, lobed and toothed, 2 to 8 inches long, up to 1 inch wide and prickly underneath on the midrib. The many pale yellow flower heads are on branching stems. The seeds are about 1 /8 inch longs, 5 to 7 ribs on each side. The seed is beak-tipped with a cluster of fine white hairs which carry the seed on the wind.

Impact

Nuisance Weed. Introduced from Europe, it is one of the most common weeds of gardens, fields, roadsides, and other idle land. Prickly lettuce is drought tolerant and competes strongly with other plants for moisture. In winter wheat it can have detrimental effects on crop value and harvesting efficiency. Cattle feeding exclusively on fresh, young prickly lettuce plants have been reported to develop pulmonary emphysema, but mature plants and dried younger plants appear to be non-toxic.

Control

Seedlings and rosettes of prickly lettuce are easily controlled by cultivation, and it is not usually found in tilled fields. Because leaves lie close to the soil surface, mowing of rosettes is not an effective control practice. Plants that are mown after stem extension readily produce new stems or branches and flowers. Herbicides are also effective.



Puncturevine

Tribulus terrestris

Identification

Puncturevine is a mat forming annual whose spiny fruits can puncture bicycle tires and injure people and pets. The reddish green or brownish stems can extend 10 feet in all directions from a central taproot. The compound leaves are opposite and divided into 5 to 8 pairs of hairy leaflets. Yellow flowers in the leaf axils produce woody 5 parted fruits. On the mature fruit, large and small spines are arranged at different angles, so that in any position at least one spine points upwards to penetrate tires, shoes, or other objects.

Impact

Class B Noxious Weed. Also known as goathead, Puncturevine was introduced from the Mediterranean region, and thrives in dry, loose, sandy soils and along roadsides. It can also grow in other soils, particularly in moist, heavy soils or compacted soils of parking lots or playgrounds.

Control

To prevent establishment in new areas, tilling, hoeing or herbicides are effective before the bur formation. If the green burs are present, the seeds may be killed by burning the plants. Two weevils, *Microlarinus lareynii* and *M. lypriformis* are biological controls but may not be suited to our colder winters.

Photo courtesy Steve Dewey

Quackgrass

Elytrigia repens

Identification

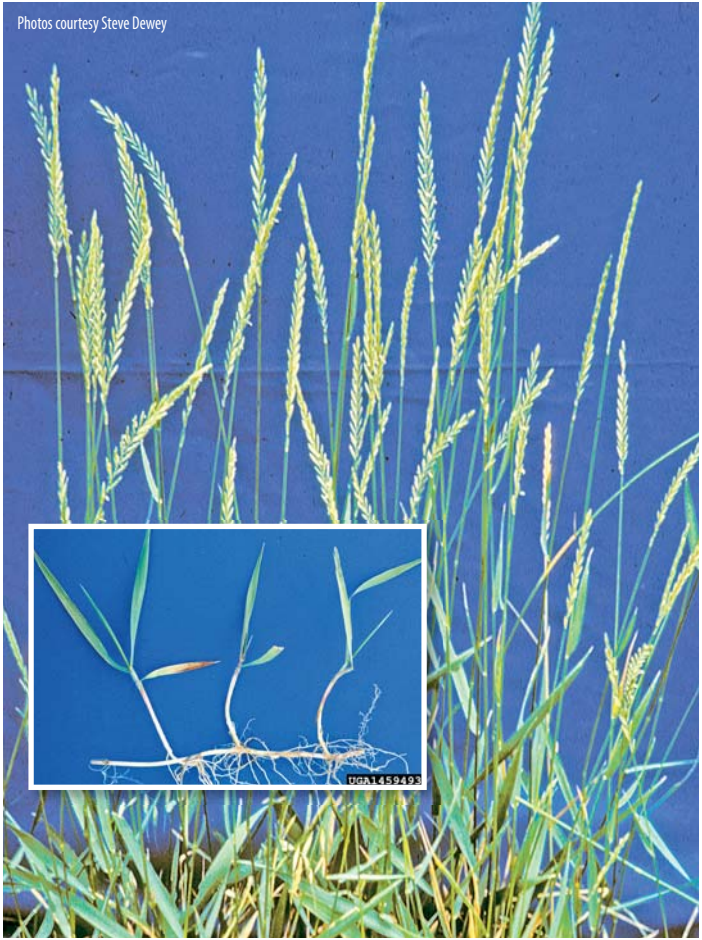
Quackgrass, also known as couch grass, is an aggressive perennial grass reproducing by seed or via long, slender, branching rhizomes. Rhizomes are usually yellow to white, fleshy and pointed forming a dense thick sod. This root system is able to penetrate hard packed soils, tubers and even roots of other plants. Stems are erect and grow to a height of three feet with leaves that are 1/3 inch wide, flat, and long. Small ear-like appendages called auricles are present at the junction of the blade and sheath. Leaf sheaths and the upper portion of leaf blades are sparsely covered by soft hairs. Flowers are borne on spikelets and closely resemble wheat. Spikelets occur in rows and lie flat to the stem. Florets lack an awn or possess short, straight awns.

Impact

Nuisance Weed. Quackgrass is a tenacious invader and difficult to control. The weed has spread over much of North America since being introduced from the Mediterranean area. It impacts agricultural lands as well as lawns and home gardens. Quackgrass reduces productivity in pasture, range and croplands by crowding out more desirable species with its allelopathic abilities.

Control

Manual or tillage control of quackgrass is very difficult since each root fragment has the ability to produce a new plant.



Redroot Pigweed

Amaranthus retroflexus

Introduction

Redroot Pigweed is an annual growing 3 to 6 feet tall, is sometimes branched above. The main stem is red towards the base and the root is red.. The dull, dark green leaves of redroot pigweed are alternate, distinctly veined and sparsely hairy. The leaves are broadly lance shaped, narrowing to a point at the tip. It flowers from July to Sept and is pollinated by wind and insects. Flowers are small, green and crowded into dense fingerlike spikes that form long, terminal clusters. Each flower is surrounded by three stiff, awl shaped bracts which have spiny tips to protect developing seeds from predators.

Impact

Nuisance Weed. A single redroot pigweed can produce up to one million seeds, 95 percent of which are viable up to 40 years! Redroot seeds turn from reddish to shiny jet-black as they mature. Seeds can germinate from spring into summer in a variety of soil types. Common along roadsides and in waste places and other disturbed open habitats, including cultivated fields and gardens. Pigweed is so named because pigs like the taste of it. But depending on its developmental stage and nitrogen fertility, redroot pigweed can accumulate enough nitrates to be poisonous to livestock.

Control

Because this weed is an annual and has a relatively shallow root system, its seedlings are easily destroyed by cultivation. But once established, redroot pigweed is difficult to control. It can recover from clipping and trampling. It grows rapidly and uses water very efficiently. It can be controlled by most preemergence herbicides used for broad leaved weeds.

Russian Knapweed

Rhaponticum repens

Identification

Russian knapweed is a long-lived bushy perennial that forms dense colonies and can grow to three feet tall. Stems turn dark brown to black when aged, but start out whitish and wooly in young plants. Leaves are blue-green. It has black vigorously creeping roots that are capable of developing into leafy shoots. Stem leaves have a toothed edge and basal leaves are deeply notched. Flower heads are pink to purple, pineapple shaped and grown singly at the end of the stem.

Impact

Class B Noxious Weed. It crowds out native species due to allelopathic chemicals produced in the leaves and roots and its extensive, dense, creeping root systems. Toxic to horses, but other livestock can eat it. This plant is thought to have been introduced from Turkistan in alfalfa seed and is resistant to drought.

Control

Russian knapweed reproduces through root and vegetative propagation, with seed production of secondary importance. Tilling is not recommended. Like other creeping perennials, the key to controlling this plant is to stress it and cause the plant to deplete its nutrient stores in the root system. While it does not tolerate shade, the best management is thought to be cultural control combined with mechanical and/or chemical control techniques, reseed with competitive species after treatment. Sod forming grasses seem to help prevent reinvasion more effectively than bunch grasses. Grazing management will also aid the effectiveness of control methods. Biocontrols of Russian knapweed are being investigated, but not widely available.

Photos courtesy OSU

Russian Thistle

Salsola kali

Identification

A rounded, bushy, many branched annual 1/2 to 4 feet tall, producing by seed. Stems are red or purple striped. Leaves are alternate, the first long string-like and soft, with later leaves short, scale-like and tipped with a stiff spine. Inconspicuous green flowers are borne in axils of upper leaves, with each flower joined by a pair of spiny bracts.

Impact

Nuisance Weed. Although not a noxious weed, Russian thistle is truly a nuisance. Seeds are spread as mature plants break off at ground level and scatter by the wind as tumbleweeds. Rapid germination and seeding establishment can occur after only a brief rain shower. Russian thistle was introduced in the late 1800s and has become one of the most common and troublesome weeds in the drier parts of the United States. It is well adapted to the Douglas County cultivated dryland agriculture, but also found on disturbed wastelands, overgrazed rangeland, and even irrigated crop land.

Control

Prevent Russian thistle from going to seed by mowing, pulling, hoeing, cultivating or burning before it goes to bloom. Properly dispose of the old plants. Herbicides can be applied. Biocontrols are obtainable but only beneficial on large populations of the weed. The Russian thistle Casebearer, *Coleophora klimeschiella,* larvae of a moth, has been shown to be effective.

Photo courtesy Bonnie Million

Yellow Salsify

Tragopogon dubius

Identification

Also known as oyster plant or yellow goatsbeard, this biennial can reach 1 to 3 feet, with a long taproot. Herbage has a milky juice; leaves are narrow, up to 12 inches long. Flower heads occur at the end of long, hollow peduncles. The yellow flowers usually close by noon. The seed heads resemble those of dandelions and are eaten by small birds such as finches.

Impact

Nuisance Weed. Left alone, these plants can easily dominate a lawn or garden. It is native to this area and more of a pest in the garden and not classified as noxious.

Control

Remove plants before flowers go to seed. The large taproot can be pulled out to eliminate the plant. Birds will eat the seeds but may scatter them to other areas.

Yellow Starthistle

Centaurea solstitalis

Identification

Yellow starthistle is a biennial or winter annual that grows up to 3 feet tall. This extensively branched weed is very distinctive. Young plants start with a basal rosette with deeply lobed leaves while upper leaves are entire and sharply pointed. The rosette resembles dandelion leaves. Both leaves and stem are covered with wooly, fine hairs giving the plant a grayish tint. Flowers are similar to knapweed; they are yellow and possess a long needle-sharp yellowish spine at the base. Starthistle spreads by seeds and possesses a long tap root.

Impact

Class B Noxious Weed. Yellow starthistle is an aggressive invader that can colonize most semi-arid rangeland where it rapidly outcompetes native vegetation and replaces desired forage. Commonly spread as a contaminant in seed alfalfa, clover, hay and straw, it can be fatal to horses.

SPECIAL NOTICE -

Control

Due to Yellow Starthistle's new emergence in Douglas County, if you spot this plant, please report its location to your conservation district or WSU Extension. Containment and eradication of this aggressive intruder is a top priority for both agencies. Several insects are available for control, but hopefully will not be needed in Douglas County.