



# BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

1500 Hwy 2, Suite 101 • Sandpoint, ID 83864 • Phone: (208) 255-5681ext.6  
<https://www.bonnercountyid.gov/noxious-weeds>

## Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl, *Bonner County Weeds Manager*

Understanding infestation vectors is an important component when considering an overall management plan for noxious & invasive weeds on your property. Integrated weed management includes prevention, cultural control, mechanical control, biological control and chemical control. I have touched on the overall concept in previous articles with varying points of emphasis. Cultural control kind of floats in the territory between prevention and an actual control method, being that it's the practice of strengthening desirables to the point of preventing new invasive weed infestations as well as allowing them to compete with more established invaders. This is achieved through fertilization, watering, overseeding and, where appropriate, planting cover crops to tie up fallow ground that is otherwise bare. Instituting these actions is not always practical (or possible), so the best course of action along the lines of cultural control is to minimize ground disturbances. Many invasive weeds produce an abundance of seeds and have established banks of them across the landscape, but a lot of invasives do not like strong competition. In areas where native vegetation is thick, the invasive weeds have a tougher time generating momentum. If one of those areas gets torn up, for whatever reason, that often opens a vector for an infestation of noxious and/or invasive weeds. Oftentimes the disturbance is necessary, i.e. – logging, building site prep, road construction and roadside ditching are a few examples. Be prepared to expect an infestation of invasive weeds once the dust settles, and plan accordingly—they will germinate and propagate faster than the native plants. There are more weeds than you can shake a stick at where, among the top listed habitats, is disturbed sites.

**Black Mustard (*Brassica nigra*)** is one of a few invasive mustards in the region, but is probably the most common specimen in the mustard family (well, at least the most common species of the *Brassica* genus) that I've observed in Bonner County. Black Mustard is a winter annual, but has a longer than average flowering period compared to other winter annuals; mid-spring to mid-summer. The flowers are a bright, canary yellow and have 4 petals per cluster. It bolts to heights between 2 and 5 feet, and is a pretty busy looking plant with variable leaf shapes and compounding stems. The lower half of Black Mustard has larger, lobed leaves, where the upper half stands in contrast with much smaller, oblong to linear leaves. The fruiting bodies develop into the shape of a beak and hugs the stems. Upon going to seed and completing its life cycle, the skeleton turns black.



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Black Mustard is one of many that loves disturbance, and is also an opportunist in pastures that are less healthy than ideal. It only spreads by seed, which disperse close to the parent plants. Those are two plusses, however—the amount of seeds produced are abundant, and they remain viable for a long time. Black Mustard also possesses allelopathic properties, meaning it puts off chemicals that prevent other surrounding plants from germinating, adding to the invasiveness. The chemical control solution is either Telar® (chlorsulfuron) or Escort® (metsulfuron). Those chemistries are generally what you want for most weeds in the mustard family, as long as the labeled use sites match up with the application area at hand. As for mechanical control, it can be cut or mowed effectively prior to fruiting (development of the “beaks”), being that it’s an annual.

I’ve had samples of Black Mustards brought to me for identification while posted up at our fair booth. By August, it has gone to seed and the black skeletons remain—sticking out like a sore thumb. The unique late summer appearance catches the eye. If you bring an interesting specimen to me for identification at the upcoming fair, you might inspire a future article. :-)