



# BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

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

## Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl

Winter annuals germinate in the fall, lay dormant throughout the winter, then bolt in the spring when most other plants are still trying to crawl out of dormancy. As such, winter annual weeds will be the first ones you see pop up across the landscape this spring. They flower, set seed and senesce (die off) by the end of spring/beginning of summer.

Weed of the month is **Cheatgrass** (*Bromus tectorum*), also called Downy Brome. It's a winter annual grass that came in from the Mediterranean region in packing materials. Not a noxious weed in Idaho but can be a nuisance, and one that my office receives a few calls on every year. Being a winter annual, it shows itself relatively early in the growing season—one of just a handful of prolific winter annual grasses in our area. The main identifying characteristic is the seed heads; at maturity they are 2 to 6 inches long while drooping to one side, and they exhibit a purplish color [just prior to disbursing seed] that distinguishes them from their surroundings. Looking at a patch of Cheatgrass reminds me of shaggy hair—a pretty clear distinction from the other grasses.

Cheatgrass can be found in pastures, croplands, orchards, roadsides, rangelands and vacant urban/suburban lots. Isolated patches is generally not a big deal, but if the infestation becomes solid the quality of your pasture or crop could deteriorate. The ideal situation for a pasture is to have a stand of healthy, native perennial grasses; Cheatgrass robs resources from the perennials since it starts actively growing earlier in the spring (gets a jump start on the competition). In addition, due to the fact that Cheatgrass dies in early summer, a solid infestation across a pasture can create a tinder box. I think I can speak for most by saying we don't need any more summer wildfires than we've already been experiencing!



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The plus side related to control is it will only reproduce by seed, and the seeds are very short lived (2-3 years). The downside is the limited number of tools to battle it if infestations reach a high level—killing a grass out of a desirable stand of grass poses a set of challenges. There is an herbicide on the market specifically for control of annual grasses, winter annuals in particular; Plateau® (Imazapic). While Imazapic has shown to control Cheatgrass in dryland wheat country, field trials in Northern Idaho have demonstrated poor control. Glyphosate products (Roundup® and several generics) would be your best tool for herbicide control, be it spot treatments for isolated patches or a solid treatment for larger infestations. Since Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide (kills grasses and broadleaves), post treatment of a pasture would require re-seeding with native perennial grasses. Another herbicide option is the use of Milestone® (Aminopyralid)—this is a broadleaf herbicide and does not actually control Cheatgrass, but studies have found that it can reduce the seedbank viability. Not a bad way to tackle a small to moderate infestation of Cheatgrass if you're already using an Aminopyralid product for broadleaf noxious weed control. Mechanical control for small or isolated patches can be achieved by mowing/cutting/cultivating before the seeds are ripe. For dealing with large infestations mechanically, a one year fallow for your pasture or crop would be the surest way to gain the upper hand; plow the field under as early as you can in the spring or as late as you can in the fall. For follow up in a pasture, re-seed with a native perennial grass mix—if in a specific crop area, plant a cover crop for the year. There are no biological control agents available for Cheatgrass—some soil fungi and suppressive bacteria have been tested but none have shown to be effective yet.

Don't hesitate to contact the Bonner County Weeds office for additional information on Cheatgrass; management can be complex and there are usually more details involved than the 'reader's digest' version that I just gave you. Also, don't hesitate to contact us for assistance with the control/identification of any weed that's been giving you fits. On the heels of a very cold and snowy February, nicer days ahead is an encouraging thought. Think spring!