



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*

I regularly make references to the weather in these articles. Oftentimes it's for comic amusement, but it's also because of the relevancy weather has on weeds and their related control measures. It applies to the short term and the long term. In the instance of long term trends—La Niña, El Niño and Neutral weather cycles have different effects on vegetative growth and propagation patterns. El Niño is a warming of the Pacific waters, which results in warmer and drier weather in the northwest, relative to average. That usually translates to milder winters and warmer shoulder seasons. La Niña is basically the opposite—cooling of the Pacific waters resulting in cooler and wetter weather in the northwest, relative to average. As of March, La Niña has been declared over and has transitioned to Neutral. Despite the transition out of La Niña, unseasonably cold spring weather has held on in the northwest, and that is due in part to a breakdown of the Polar Vortex, where arctic air dips into the mid-latitudes. With all that said, I am (so far) still seeing vegetative patterns in alignment with La Niña conditions. Weeds that thrive with lots of moisture and relatively cooler temperatures could be at the forefront until we get close to summer. Conversely, if later this year we shift from Neutral to El Niño (which is likely according to NOAA), we could see the weeds crop of 2024 dominated by those that prefer warmer and/or drier cycles.

One that exploded in our region during the cool and wet conditions in the spring of 2022, was **Hairy Vetch (*Vicia villosa*)**. It's a winter annual in the pea family with 10-20 leaflets per leaf cluster, and 20-60 purple colored flowers per cluster—all on one side of the stalk, usually. A feature that can also help with identification is the tendrils; threadlike appendages at the tips of the stems that form a spiral. Hairy Vetch was brought over from Europe to be used as a cover crop. Plants in the pea family are common for cover crop use, but this one escaped containment and has become a fairly prolific invader. The seeds are very durable, and maintain viability for a long time, which makes them well equipped to lie in wait for a catalyst to sprout. Land owners are not required by code to control Hairy Vetch, as it is not on the Idaho Noxious Weed List—it falls into the widespread, invasive nuisance basket. It's toxic to horses and cattle, with consumption causing a myriad of health issues related to the nervous system, digestive system and cardiovascular system. The highest concentration of toxic compounds are reported to be in the seed pods, making the specimen the most toxic at full maturity.



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When it comes to invasive weeds, Hairy Vetch is a control priority in pastures and hay production ground due to the livestock toxicity factor. Since it's a winter annual, the window for control is typically over by July. I've seen it respond well to chemistries that control other weeds in the pea family; triclopyr (Vastlan®, Garlon®, Crossbow®, etc.), clopyralid (Curtail®, Cody®, Transline®, etc.) and/or aminopyralid (Milestone®, Whetstone®). Some of those are combination products with 2,4-D, others are standalone active ingredients. The use site and potentially other weeds that need to be treated in conjunction with the Hairy Vetch will influence which product is right for you.

Hand pulling can be done on small scale, scattered infestations with minimal trouble—there is not much of a root system being an annual, and the plant itself can be gripped easily for extraction. Aside from pastures and areas managed for hay, it's also good to keep it out of areas with busy foot traffic. The viney nature of the stems makes for a deceptively strong tripping hazard, as it gets tangled up in your feet faster than you can realize you've just made a faceplant into the ground.

To close the loop on weather influencing weeds, short term trends affect the control aspect. If there's a period of weeks on end with rain or 10+ MPH winds, with a day or two of a reprieve between Mother Nature's temper tantrums, you need to be prepared to drop something else in order to take advantage of that window for treatment. It applies mostly to annuals (which includes Hairy Vetch) being that they are more timing sensitive. It also applies to the perennials with a very short flowering period—Hawkweeds come to mind.

Looking at the extended forecast, it appears that we might have a breakthrough sometime between the time I submit this and the time it is published. Hoping it holds!