

Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*)

Currently in Montana, noxious weed infest about 8.2 million acres. Many of these state listed noxious weeds were brought to America as ornamentals for gardens, medicinal purposes, by accident in discarded soil from a ship's ballast, or unintentionally in bags of seed brought from other parts of the world. Whatever the cause of introduction non-native plant species have found their way onto Montana's state listed noxious weed list.

Cheatgrass is native to the Mediterranean region of Europe and was introduced to the United States accidentally as a contaminant in crop seed and ballast soil sometime before 1860. Cheatgrass was able to spread rapidly around the country because straw contaminated with cheatgrass seeds was used by railroad companies as packing material. Early wheat farmers thought that they had been 'cheated' by being sold impure seed that reduced the yield of their wheat crop. Cheatgrass grows to about 20-70 cm in height, its leaves and blades are covered with soft short hairs. Cheatgrass flowers from May to June and seeds can germinate in the fall or the spring.

Cheatgrass can be identified by its branched base and its silvery green color, before going to seed it is rusty-red to purple. After flowering and producing seed, cheatgrass turns golden in color. Cheatgrass produces seeds that are 3/8" long with a long bristle like appendage or 'awn'. The awn can get stuck in clothing, socks, shoes and animal fur; providing a mode of transportation for the seed.

One cheatgrass plant has the potential to produce as many as 300 seeds per plant. Seeds can remain viable for up to 11 years in dry storage and buried seeds can maintain viability for 2-5 years. Cheatgrass can be controlled by various integrated weed management techniques. Scientists are studying a fungus called, 'Black Fingers of Death' that may be used as a biological control agent to kill dormant cheatgrass seeds. The name comes from the fingerlike, black fruiting bodies that protrude from killed seeds.

Please take a few moments to learn about noxious weeds. If noxious weeds are not currently a problem in your area, they may be in the near future. For more information about Montana's state listed noxious weeds, regulated plants, or weed species listed on your county weed list, please contact your local county weed district (can list weed district name here... ex: Lewis & Clark County Weed District) at _(406)_(Phone number)_. Or you can contact the Montana Department of Agriculture at (406) 444-5600.