

DOWNY BROME

(*Bromus tectorum* L.)



DOWNY BROME

State Noxious Weed List: **No.**

Downy brome is native to the Mediterranean region and is thought to have been introduced first near Denver, Colo., as a contaminant in packing material. The plant now is distributed widely throughout North America. Downy brome often is found as a contaminant in grass and crop seed and is difficult to separate from the desirable species.

Identification and growth form:

Downy brome is an annual or winter annual grass that can range in height from 4 to 30 inches. Seedlings are bright green with conspicuously hairy leaves. Stems are erect, slender and glabrous or slightly hairy. Foliage and seed heads of mature plants often change color from green to purple to brown or tan as the plant dries. A single downy brome plant can be comprised of one or two tillers or as many as 20 tillers. Inflorescence is dense, slender, usually drooping, one-sided, and 2 to 6 inches in length. Spikelets are nodding, slender and up to 0.75 inch long. Plants have five to eight florets per spikelet. Long, straight awns are attached to florets that are 3/8 to 5/8 inch long and are usually purple at maturity.

Seedlings germinate in the fall or winter at very high rates as soon as moisture conditions are favorable. Downy brome grows rapidly until late fall when the soil freezes, although above-ground growth may continue during warm or rainy conditions. The root system often will continue to develop throughout the winter. In the spring, the plant develops rapidly and produces heads in late April to early May, flowers within a week and produces seed by mid to late June. Downy brome is a prolific seed producer with production ranging from 25 to 5,000 seeds per plant.

Why is this plant a concern?

Downy brome can thrive in a variety of habitats and the plant quickly displaces desirable plant communities and lowers plant diversity. Downy brome can be a ready fuel source for fires because the plant grows in high densities and dries down very early in the season. Downy brome is palatable to livestock but only for a brief period during the spring and early summer. The seeds have long awns that may cause sores in the mouth and eyes of livestock that graze it and reduce wool values when it attaches to sheep as they walk through an infested area. Downy brome can become especially weedy in winter wheat.

How do I control this plant?

Chemical. Several herbicides, including Everest (flucarbazone), Olympus (propoxycarbazone) and Beyond (imazamox), are labeled for downy brome control in cropland. Plateau (imazapic) applied in the fall will control downy brome in pasture and rangeland.

Mechanical. Hand-pulling small infestations may eliminate current seed production. Disking is often ineffective, unless tilled 4 to 6 inches deep in order to bury seeds and prevent germination. Mowing may reduce plant production but seeds already may be viable and plants may regenerate new culms if conducted during the early growth stage.

Biological. No biological control agents or pathogens are available for this weed.