

# HOARY CRESS

[*Cardaria draba* (L.) Desv.]

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# HOARY CRESS

State Noxious Weed List: **No.**

Hoary cress (also called whitetop) is native to the Balkan Peninsula, Armenia, Turkey, Israel, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The plant is widely introduced and naturalized throughout Europe and all other continents. Hoary cress first was introduced to the United States at Long Island, N.Y., in 1862 through a ship's ballast or contaminated seed.

Identification and growth form:

Hoary cress is a deep-rooted perennial forb that can grow up to 2 feet tall. Stems of the plant are erect, branching above, glabrous or slightly to densely pubescent below, and appear gray. Hoary cress has both basal and stem leaves. Basal leaves have scattered to dense pubescence, are irregularly toothed to entire and taper to a short stalk that attaches to the crown of the plant near the ground. Middle and upper stem leaves are sparsely pubescent, have two lobes clasping the stem and are grayish green. Flowers of the plant are white, four-petaled and borne on slender stalks. Seed capsules are shaped like an inverted heart and usually contain two seeds. The seeds are oval or round at one end, narrow to a blunt point at the other and reddish-brown.

Seedlings of hoary cress germinate in the fall and overwinter as rosettes. The perennial root system is established the following spring and consists of vertical and lateral roots. Both root types can produce adventitious buds that develop into rhizomes and new shoots. Plants flower from May to June and begin producing seeds by July. A single plant can produce between 1,200 and 4,800 seeds each year, with a single flowering stem capable of producing as many as 850 seeds. Seeds can remain viable in the soil for approximately three years.

Why is this plant a concern?

Hoary cress is an aggressive plant that can form dense monocultures on disturbed land. Disturbances such as grazing, cultivation and especially irrigation can promote the colonization and spread of the plant. Hoary cress can displace native plant species, thereby reducing biodiversity and forage production. Whitetop contains glucosinolates that can be toxic to cattle but livestock only graze hoary cress in the spring if more palatable forage is not available.

How do I control this plant?

**Chemical.** Hoary cress is in the mustard family so herbicides commonly used to control mustards generally work well on this weed. Escort or Ally (metsulfuron), Oust or Telar (chlorsulfuron), MCPA and 2,4-D have been used to control the plant. However, timing of herbicide application is important and should be done in early spring or in the fall after seed germination.

**Mechanical.** Digging can provide control for small infestations of hoary cress if the entire root system is removed. Hand-pulling generally is not effective because the root system may not be entirely removed. Cultivation is the major factor for the spread of the plant because root fragments that are left behind can produce new plants. Cultivation can eradicate plants if cultivations are repeated frequently throughout the growing season for a period of two to four years.

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