

Beware! Hoary Cress Coming Soon to a Neighborhood Near You

By Janet Lowe
For the Grand County Weed Board

Hoary cress, or “whitetop” is found mentioned in some of Utah’s earliest weed irradiation guides. It has occupied a spot on the Utah Noxious Weed list since it was first drafted in _____. The exotic plant was introduced from Europe and Western Asia. It forms large patches in cultivated fields, gardens, pastures, along roadways, and riparian areas. It is extremely competitive with native vegetation.

Hoary cress (*Brassicaceae*) is a very hardy perennial broad-leafed weed. A member of the mustard family, it emerges in early spring. By mid-summer, the plants have bloomed and the seeds are set, so May and early June is the time to control it.

Utah farm records document very early efforts to control this invasive weed. In the early 1900s large quantities of salt were used in an attempt to control the weed. Today, however, there are excellent herbicides available to assist in the war against Hoary cress or whitetop.

Recommendations for non-crop treatment of whitetop vary depending on the area you are treating. If grasses are not to be taken out in the process, Telar by DuPont is expensive, but very effective. 2, 4-D amine applied at the bud or early bloom stage is also useful.

For bare ground treatment, Arsenal or Oust mixed with diuron works well. The best time to use these two treatments is when the plant is mature and flowering. Always remember to look at the lay of the land so that potential runoff of the chemicals does not harm crops or surrounding vegetation.

Roundup is very effective for non-selective treatment of hoary cress, but timing is everything; don’t waste your chemical on a mature whitetop in July. It’s too late to manage the weed by then.

Mowing is not an effective control measure for whitetop because the weed is perennial and will remain content to wait under a blanket of snow only to re-emerge in the spring.

There are currently no biological methods of treatment available, but the Utah Weed Department notes that you can prevent infestations of Hoary cress by maintaining range and pastures in good condition, promoting healthy grass growth with proper irrigation and fertilization, and by avoiding overgrazing of pasture lands.

Hoary cress is blue-green in color and lance-shaped. It grows up to 2-feet tall. Only lower leaves are stalked. The upper leaves have two lobes clasping the stem. Plants have many white flowers with four petals giving the plant a white, flat-topped appearance. Seed capsules are heart-shaped and contain two reddish-brown seeds separated by a narrow wall. It forms a very dense root mass which can be difficult to defeat; therefore, this weed should be closely monitored.

For assistance in identifying Hoary cress on your property, you may contact the Grand County Weed Board at 259-1369.