

War on Weeds — Weeds are Everybody's Problem

THE ISSUE: Johnsongrass

Johnsongrass (*Sorghum halepense*) is an invasive perennial grass that is native to the Mediterranean area. It was introduced to the United States as a forage crop but has proved to be a competitive weed. It invades pastures, ditch banks, and cultivated fields.

Johnsongrass spreads by seed and rhizomes, allowing it to invade new areas quickly.

Johnsongrass can grow up to 6 feet tall, has an extensive fibrous root system, and produces rhizomes (underground stems) that aid in its spread. Leaves are flat, broad, and smooth with a prominent white mid-vein. Auricles are not present while ligules are membranous and have fringed hairs at the top. Johnsongrass has large, open panicles that form in a pyramid shape and contain red to purple-colored spikelets. The seeds are oval and reddish-brown in color. One plant can produce up to 80,000 seeds in a growing season and seeds can remain viable in the soil for up to 10 years. Seeds are dispersed by humans, animals, wind, and water.



Photo courtesy of Howard F. Schwartz, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Options:

- Prevention — Learn to identify this plant. Never transport unknown plant material.
- Mechanical — Tillage is usually not a recommended method of control for weeds that spread from rhizomes, but it can be effective if used with chemical control options.
- Cultural — Mowing or grazing closely for multiple years can weaken Johnsongrass stands making other forms of control more effective. Establishing a healthy stand of desirable plants is extremely important.
- Chemical — Visit the Pacific Northwest Weed Management Handbook website (<https://pnwhandbooks.org/weed>), and search “Johnsongrass”. **Always read and follow herbicide label directions.**

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