



Medusahead Rye (*Taeniatherum Caput-Medusae*)



OTHER COMMON NAMES: medusahead, Medusa's head, medusahead grass

DESCRIPTION

Medusahead rye is a slender, **annual** grass that grows six to 18 inches tall. The leaf blades are rolled and slightly hairy. Each blade is topped by a bristly and densely crowded **spikelet**, with each bristle growing from one to four inches long. When the bristles are green, they are straight and compressed; they become twisted and erratically spread upon drying, resembling the hair of the mythical Medusa, its namesake. It becomes green two to four weeks later than associated annuals, bleaching later as well, which helps distinguish it from similar grasses. Medusahead rye blooms in May and June.

Medusahead rye spread from its native territory of the Mediterranean region of Eurasia to the United States in the late 1800s, with the first known specimen collected in Roseburg, OR in 1887. It is prevalent on millions of acres of semi-arid rangeland and wildlands in the Pacific Northwest, from California to Washington and east to Idaho, Utah, and Nevada. It is particularly problematic on The Nature Conservancy's preserves in interior valleys of Oregon.

Medusahead rye reproduces prolifically by seed, with germination typically occurring in the fall. Long distance dispersal of medusahead rye is mainly by travel on the coats of livestock, particularly sheep, but also by soil movement and human activity. Local dispersal from established patches is a result of wind and/or water.

The negative qualities of medusahead rye are best demonstrated in eastern Oregon, where it out-competes other grasses by extracting the majority of moisture from the soil well before perennial grasses have begun to grow. Once land has become infested with medusahead rye, it becomes almost worthless, supporting neither native animals and birds or livestock. It also changes the temperature and moisture dynamics of the soil,

WHEN TO FIND MEDUSAHEAD RYE

It can be found in late spring and throughout the summer and fall. It begins to bloom in May, when it will be green in color; it reaches full maturity by mid-June and will have turned brown.

WHERE TO FIND MEDUSAHEAD RYE

It grows best in clay soils, and can be found on disturbed sites (e.g. overgrazed land or land with sparse vegetation), grasslands, oak woodlands, and agronomic fields.

WHAT TO DO

Report this plant and remove or reduce spread from your property. Disking and plowing can reduce seeding. Herbicides applied in the spring will also reduce medusahead. Consult a local weed expert before using herbicides. Always follow label instructions.

greatly reducing seed germination of other species, and creating fuel for wildfires.¹ Proposed control methods for this troublesome grass include controlled burning, flash grazing (i.e. having sheep graze on the grass in early spring when it is still green and palatable), maintaining a good stand of perennial vegetation to prevent invasion, and certain herbicides.

WEB LINKS

http://www.co.tooele.ut.us/W_Medusahead.htm

<http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/phpps/ipc/weedinfo/taeniatherum-caput-medusae.htm>

http://oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/WEEDS/profile_medusaheadrye.shtml

<http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/plants/medusahead.shtml>

http://www.weedcenter.org/management/weed_mgmt_profiles.html#camel

REFERENCES

Maurer, Teresa, Mary J. Russo (rev.), and Audrey Godell (rev.). Element Stewardship Abstract for *Taeniatherum Caput-Medusae*, Medusahead Rye. The Nature Conservancy. <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/documnts/taencap.pdf>



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¹ Adapted from the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Plant Division website. http://oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/WEEDS/profile_medusaheadrye.shtml