

Invasive Grasses

The species found in this brochure are non-native, invasive grass species that present a threat to Nebraska's economy, environment, and wildlife. They form monoculture infestations that crowd out native species and reduce the value of the land upon which they are found. They are less palatable for livestock and wildlife than their native counterparts and in some cases have the potential to increase the incidence and severity of wildfires.

While not all the species in this brochure are found in Nebraska, it is critically important for the public to report and/or control these species when they are found. A list of resources for reporting, identification, and control recommendations are below.

Report invasive and noxious weeds to your county weed superintendent:



Seek assistance with plant identification from your local University of Nebraska extension educator:



Report any invasive species to the Nebraska Invasive Species Council:



Invasive Range & Pasture Grasses in Nebraska

NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Roots.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Photo credit:
Leslie J. Mehroff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

Produced by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the Nebraska Weed Control Association and the University of Nebraska.

Yellow Bluestem (*Bothriochloa ischaemum*)

Yellow bluestem is a warm season, perennial bunchgrass first introduced in the early 1900's for erosion control and forage. It is less palatable and nutritious than its native counterparts. Since its introduction it has been spreading northward.

Identification:

- 1.5-3.5 ft tall
- Open, fan-shaped seed head
- Noticeably yellow monocultures in the fall
- Blooms late June-July before native bluestems
- Long hairs near base, extending up the leaf blade



Photo credit:
Top: John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy, Bugwood.org
Left: Michelle Villafranca, Fort Worth Nature Center, Bugwood.org
Right: Cheryl Dunn, UNL

Caucasian Bluestem (*Bothriochloa bladhii*)

Caucasian bluestem is a warm season, perennial bunchgrass that was first introduced in the early 1900s for erosion control and forage. It has spread northward and is not as palatable or nutritious compared to its native counterparts.

Identification:

- 1-4 ft tall
- Silver/red purple seed head
- Long hairs on leaf blade near base
- Thin, tapered yellow-green leaves
- Blooms late June-July before native bluestems



Photo credit:
Top: Matt Lavin, MSU
Left & right: Oklahoma State University

Ventenata

(*Ventenata dubia*)

Ventenata is a cool season, winter annual grass that has been spreading eastward since its introduction in Washington over 60 years ago. It is currently a noxious weed in Wyoming and has been found in South Dakota. It outcompetes native grass and is not palatable to livestock or wildlife.

Identification:

- 0.5-2.5 ft tall
- Dark red and black nodes on the stem
- Bent awns (bristles attached to the seed)
- Branches at 90° to stem in seed head
- Tan/yellow monoculture in the summer



Photo credit:
Matt Lavin, MSU

Medusahead

(*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*)

Medusahead is a cool season, winter annual grass that is listed on both Colorado and Wyoming's noxious weed lists. It outcompetes native vegetation and has low palatability for livestock. The mature stems provide a fine fuel which increases the intensity and frequency of wildfires.

Identification:

- 1 -2 ft tall
- Two lengths of awns (longer at tip, shorter at base of seedhead)
- Awns stay attached after maturity
- Bright green color in early spring



Photo credit:
Top: Steve Dewey, Utah State University, Bugwood.org
Left: Barry Rice, sarracenia.com, Bugwood.org
Right: John M. Randall, The Nature Conservatory, Bugwood.org

Cheatgrass

(*Bromus tectorum*)

Cheatgrass is a cool season, winter annual grass that was introduced in the U.S. in the 1700s. It is established in Nebraska but still warrants control when it is found. Cheatgrass outcompetes native species. The awns can cause damage to the eyes and mouth of livestock.

Identification:

- 0.5-2 ft tall
- Seeds mature mid-April through June
- Nodding seed head
- Spiky awns (bristles attached to seed)



Photo credit:
Top & left: Matt Lavin, MSU
Right: Leslie J. Mehroff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

Johnson Grass

(*Sorghum halepense*)

Johnson grass is a warm season, perennial that was introduced as a pasture grass in the 1800s. It has since become established in southern Nebraska where it forms dense monocultures that are difficult to eradicate. It can become poisonous to livestock after drought or frost.

Identification:

- 1.5-8 ft tall
- Pyramidal seed head, often purple
- Leaves with prominent white midrib
- Sometimes confused with Shattercane



Photo credit:
Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org