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.

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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