



# Cheatgrass *Bromus tectorum*

**Common Names:** cheatgrass, brome, downy brome, drooping brome, thatch brome, brongrass, military grass, downy chess, early chess, soft chess, wild oats

**Native Range:** Europe, the northern rim of Africa, and southwestern Asia.



**Description:** A winter annual in the grass family (Poaceae), bearing many finely hairy, drooping, yellowish-green, bristly spikelets in a loose, much-branched, terminal cluster. It forms small tufts 8-24 inches tall, from a fine fibrous root system. Stems are erect and slender. Leaf blades are flat and pubescent. The inflorescence is a dense, drooping panicle 1 ½ to 8 inches long and is pale green to purplish in color. Branches are thin, flexuous, and pubescent. Spikelets are four to seven-flowered and pubescent or villous. Cheatgrass reproduces by seed that germinates in the fall, over winters as a seedling, then flowers in the spring. Seeds have the potential to remain viable in the seed bank for 2 to 5 years.



**Habitat:** It grows on rangelands, pastures, prairies, fields, waste areas, eroded sites, and roadsides. It exists in many climatic areas but primarily in the 6-27 inches precipitation zone. It will grow in almost any type of soil, however, is most commonly found on coarse textured soils on B and C horizons of eroded areas and areas low in nitrogen with soil temperatures between 2.0-3.5°C and 15°C. Litter promotes germination and establishment of seedlings.

**Distribution:** This species is reported from states shaded on Plants Database map. It is reported invasive in AZ, CA, CO, CT, HI, ID, NE, NJ, NV, OR, PA, SD, TN, UT, WA, WV, and WY.

**Ecological Impacts:** Many of the ecosystems that cheatgrass has invaded are seriously altered, and no longer support the vegetation of the potential natural community. Cheatgrass can maintain dominance for many years on sites where native vegetation has been eliminated or severely reduced by grazing, cultivation, or fire. At maturity the spikelets break apart; the sharp-pointed, bristly sections can injure grazing animals by working into the nose, ears, mouth, or eyes. Spikelets can also cling to hikers' clothing. It tends to be most invasive in areas receiving 12 to 22 inches of annual precipitation.

### Control and Management:

- **Manual-** Fire, mowing, grazing, tillage, and inter-seeding of competitive native plants have all been shown to reduce populations.
- **Chemical-** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate Follow label and state requirements.
- **Biological control** is limited. Rabbits and mice will feed extensively on this species as do migratory grasshoppers (*Melanoplus sanguinipes*). It is often infected with a head smut (*Ustilago bulleta* Berk.) that, when severe, may reduce seed yield. Some research has been conducted on pink snow mold (*Fusarium nivale*) as a biological control agent, but information has yet to be released.

**References:** [www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/othrdata/exoticab/scotbrot.htm](http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/othrdata/exoticab/scotbrot.htm), <http://plants.usda.gov>, <http://enature.com/fieldguide>, [www.fs.fed.us/database](http://www.fs.fed.us/database), [www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org), [www.sci.sdsu.edu/plants/sdpls/plants/Bromus\\_tectorum.html](http://www.sci.sdsu.edu/plants/sdpls/plants/Bromus_tectorum.html)