



# Hoary Cress

*Lepidium draba*, *Lepidium repens*, and *Hymenophysa pubescens*  
Other common names: White top and perennial peppergrass

In the Pacific Northwest there are three distinct plants called white top. Though similar in general appearance, they differ slightly in the shape of the seed pod. One (*Lepidium draba*) has a heart-shaped, broad, flat pod containing two seeds; another (*Lepidium repens*) has a lens-shaped pod that is flat and round and has two or four seeds; the third (*Hymenophysa pubescens*) is lower growing, and is distinguished by its small, purplish, globe-shaped seed pod. Its pod somewhat resembles that of *Lepidium repens*, except that it is smaller and "blown up." It also has two or four seeds to the pod. The habits of these three white top plants are very similar, so the information following will apply to all.

The plant is a perennial, has grayish white foliage, and grows erect from 10 to 18 inches high. The leaves are oval or oblong, generally between 1/2 inch and 3 inches long, with toothed or almost unbroken edges. The weed produces numerous white flowers which are about 1/4 inch broad, borne in large groups at the tops of the stems. A field in bloom has a solid, snowy-white appearance; hence, the name "white top." Young plants have a rosette appearance before blooming and closely resemble fan weed.

Seed of hoary cress is reddish-brown and about the same size as alfalfa seed. It is difficult to clean from alfalfa or clover seed and is often carried in these seeds as an impurity.

Some livestock will eat young plants, but the foliage becomes coarse, bitter, and woody as the plant matures. It has a disagreeable mustard taste.

Hoary cress roots have been found as deep as 30 feet under ground. They send out numerous lateral roots which

send up shoots at frequent intervals. Each of these shoots can develop into a plant, and a small piece of root, if broken off, may start a new patch. Unlike field bindweed, hoary cress increases the size of its patches in alfalfa but increases only slowly in sod-forming grasses. In time, it will choke out a field of alfalfa.

Hoary cress has been noted in several western counties and in all eastern counties of Washington and Oregon and in Idaho. It seems to prefer slightly alkaline soils but apparently will thrive in almost any kind of soil. It finds its real home on irrigated lands, but will grow on land much too dry for alfalfa. Most of the patches in the state were originally started by sowing alfalfa or clover seed that contained hoary cress seed, or by using hay with mature hoary cress. It is one of the few perennial weeds that ripen before the first cutting of alfalfa for hay, so first-cutting alfalfa as well as second is likely to carry the seed.

## *Control by Cropping and Cultivation*

Hoary cress normally starts growth in the fall and makes a rapid growth early the following spring, maturing its seed in the early summer. Because of this early spring growth and early seed maturity, it is possible to accomplish good control by early spring plowing and planting the field to a spring crop. Cereals are more suited for this type of cropping than are legumes or grasses. By repeating the spring plowing and seeding to spring crops, hoary cress can be ultimately eradicated. Crops best adapted for spring planting are wheat, oats, barley, sudangrass, or corn. Biennial or perennial legumes should not be planted



*Control with amitrol*

Amitrole, sold as Amino Triazole, Weedazol, Cytrol, or Amitrol T, is effective for the control of hoary cress, but is not registered for use on crop or grazing lands. Amitrole should be used at the rate of 4 pounds of active chemical (8 pounds of the powdered material, 2 gallons of the liquid form) per acre.

Hoary cress should be sprayed from the bud to bloom stage. One spray application usually gives about 90 percent control of hoary cress. It is practical for spot spraying small infestations. Amitrole should be applied in a spray solution containing a commercial wetting agent. Follow instructions on the wetting agent container regarding rates to use.

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