



Common Velvetgrass & German Velvetgrass

Holcus lanatus L. and *H. mollis*

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Common velvetgrass (*Holcus lanatus*) is a tufted perennial that sometimes spreads by short stolons in lawns. Widespread and abundant west of the Cascades, it occasionally grows east of the Cascades and in northern Idaho. It is found in meadows, grasslands, turf, and non-crop areas.

Common velvetgrass is a fibrous-rooted perennial growing 1 to 3 feet tall. Entire plants are more or less grayish with soft, velvety hairs. Leaf blades are flat, $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch across; sheaths are open and usually have pink veins. Ligules are membranous and very short. Inflorescence is

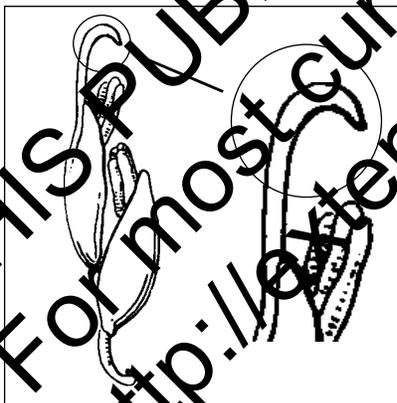


Figure 1.—Notice the hooked awn emerging from the top of a common velvetgrass floret. In German velvetgrass, the awn is bent but not hooked.



Figure 2.—German velvetgrass is hairy mostly on the node (left stem), while the entire common velvetgrass plant is hairy (right stem).

dense, panicle pale green to grayish, usually tinged with purple. Spikelets are two-flowered, and the upper floret of each spikelet has a hook-like awn. Flowering occurs from June to September.

German velvetgrass (*Holcus mollis* L.) is distinguished from common velvetgrass by its rhizomes, less hairy leaf blades, and greener color. The blades may be hairless or have fine hairs. The nodes are conspicuously hairy. Ligules are membranous and less than $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch long. The inflorescence is a branched but not dense panicle. Awns are bent but not hooked. German velvetgrass is much less prevalent than



Figure 3.—The inflorescence of common velvetgrass, as shown here, is denser than German velvetgrass.

common velvetgrass and, in the Northwest, is found only west of the Cascades.

Both grasses were introduced from Europe as meadow grasses, though both have low palatability. Common velvetgrass is a problem in pastures and lawns. It spreads by seed in pastures unless it is mowed regularly to stop seed production. It seems impossible to keep it out of turf, even with the best management. Early detection and chemical or physical removal of small clumps is the only option.

It is not clear if common velvetgrass seed contaminates turf seed regularly, if seed is carried

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to established turf by animals, equipment, or wind, or if seed is already in the soil. German velvetgrass is a problem in lawns, pastures, and in perennial grass grown for seed. Both species are especially undesirable in turf because their slightly grey color makes them so noticeable.

PREVENTION

Make every effort to use lawn and pasture seed free of velvet-grass seed. If velvet-grass seed already is in the soil, it may be worthwhile to prepare a good seedbed and then delay planting until weed seeds in the top inch of soil have germinated and emerged. You can use a non-residual herbicide to kill the weeds without disturbing the soil. This may require you to delay planting over the winter so seeds have time to germinate completely.

CONTROL

MECHANICAL. In pastures the spread of common velvetgrass may be slowed by close grazing or by mowing before seeds are produced. Intensive controlled grazing may be needed since the velvetgrass is less palatable. Anything less than intensive grazing probably favors the common velvetgrass and promotes its spread. Plowing followed by a smother crop or a clean cultivated crop for 1 or 2 years before reseeding to pasture is also an option.

Close grazing or mowing will not control German velvetgrass because of the rhizomes and prostrate growth habit under those conditions. Tillage breaks

the rhizomes and spreads them throughout the field and increases the problem. Repeated tillage in dry weather dries out the rhizomes and depletes food reserves, and either kills or weakens the plants.

CHEMICAL. Both velvet-grasses are best controlled as seedlings to prevent plants from becoming established as perennials. This rarely is practical in turf or pasture but is a normal practice in grass grown for seed. Spot treatment with non-selective herbicides is effective against established plants. This and control in fence rows and waste areas reduces the potential for infestations in the field.

Since German velvetgrass is a rhizomatous grass, treatments should be directed at controlling the rhizomes and not just the top growth. Timing herbicide applications to allow maximum herbicide movement into the rhizomes is essential for good control.

Clumps of both velvetgrasses are easily distinguished from other grasses on a morning when plants are wet with dew. This is a good time to flag the clumps for later treatment with a herbicide.

Herbicide registrations change frequently; therefore, this publication does not contain specific herbicide use instructions. Registered uses are summarized each year in the *Pacific Northwest Weed Control Handbook*.

In addition, detailed instructions for herbicide use are provided on herbicide container labels and in other literature provided by herbicide manufacturers.

USE PESTICIDES SAFELY

- Wear protective clothing and safety devices as recommended on the label. **Bathe or shower** after each use.
 - Read the pesticide label—even if you've used the pesticide before. **Follow closely** the instructions on the label (and any other directions you have).
 - **Be cautious** when you apply pesticides. **Know** your legal responsibility as a pesticide applicator. You may be liable for injury or damage resulting from pesticide use.
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