

“New” Invaders: A glimpse at a few

White bryony (*Bryonia alba*): White bryony, a member of the gourd family (Cucurbitaceae), is a perennial vine native to Europe, Asia, and northern Africa that was introduced to the Pacific Northwest in the 1970s for ornamental and medicinal purposes. White bryony can be mistaken for wild grape due to alternate, palmately lobed leaves and dark blue berries. The vine grows quickly and vigorously from a fleshy parsnip-like tuber; it has been reported to grow up to six inches per day, which explains why white bryony is sometimes called the “kudzu of the Northwest.” Five-petaled flowers are yellowish white. Berries will be green when immature, but darken upon maturation. White bryony aggressively climbs and smothers small trees and shrubs commonly found along riparian areas. All parts of the plant contain bryonin which is poisonous to humans and livestock. The plant is listed as noxious in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. In Montana it has been found primarily in horticultural settings and along riparian corridors.



Big-headed knapweed (*Centaurea macrocephala*): Believe it or not, there is yet another knapweed species to know about! Like its cousins spotted and diffuse knapweed and yellow starthistle, this perennial forb is native to Eurasia and a member of the Asteraceae family. It was introduced as an ornamental due to its showy, large, globe-shaped bright yellow flowers and leafy stiff stems. The bracts of big-headed knapweed are golden brown and fringed along the edges. Information on this plant as an invader is fairly limited, but it is believed to be able to escape ornamental settings and establish in natural areas. A quick internet search demonstrates that seeds of big-

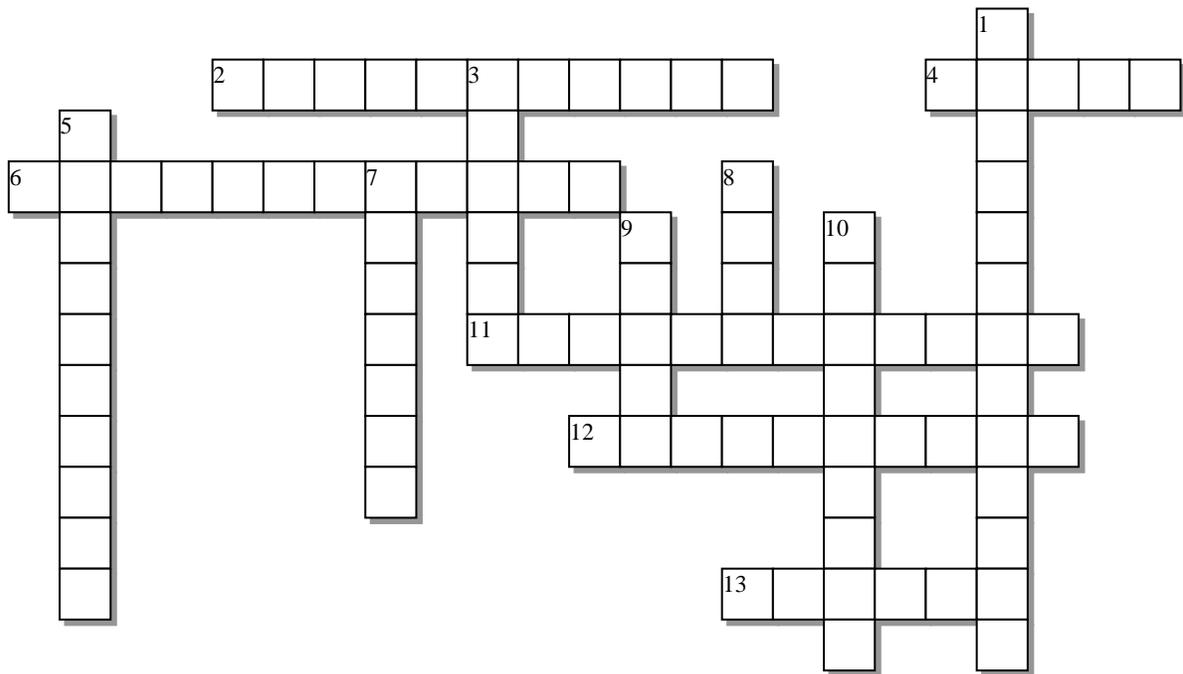


headed knapweed are readily available. Big-headed knapweed is a noxious weed in Washington state and Alberta, Canada. In both situations, the plant is found in limited areas and has been targeted for early detection and rapid response. It has been reported in five Montana counties since the mid-1970s.

Medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*): Medusahead is an annual grass (Poaceae family) from the Mediterranean region. As a seedling, this grass has bright green, slender and delicate-looking leaves. Long (>1”) awns on the seeds start to twist as the plant dries in mid-summer, resembling the mythic Greek creature Medusa who turned her victims to stone with one sight of her snake-covered head. It can be easily mistaken for the native perennial grasses foxtail barley (*Hordeum jubatum*) or squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*) due to similarly long awns; however, medusahead inflorescences do not break apart upon maturity while the native grasses do. Medusahead litter decomposes very slowly due to its high silica content, which leads to thick layers of thatch where this annual grass dominates. Medusahead is problematic on rangeland in Oregon, Idaho, and northern California where it displaces native grasses and burns readily in wildfires. It is listed as a noxious weed in several western states. Although it has been reported in Montana in the past, it is not known to be established currently.



Weed Post Puzzle: Test your knowledge of New Invaders



Across:

- 2 - While they may look like tasty grapes, snack on as few as 40 berries from this plant and consequences could be fatal
- 4 - White bryony is often compared to this notorious invasive plant of the southeastern U.S.
- 6 - This species of the *Centaurea* genus could be accused of being over-confident and egotistical
- 11 - This native grass with long awns can be easily mistaken for medusahead
- 12 - Look at the awns of this annual invasive grass to help you identify it, but don't worry-you won't be turned to stone!
- 13 - Medusahead has a high amount of _____, which may be one reason why its litter decomposes slowly

Down:

- 1 - Cucumbers, pumpkins, squash and white bryony are members of this plant family
- 3 - When identifying knapweeds, look at these to help you tell one species from another
- 5 - Big-headed knapweed is noxious in this U.S. state
- 7 - Grasses belong to this plant family
- 8 - New invaders are often targeted for this management strategy (abbreviation)
- 9 - White bryony has five petals that are yellow to _____
- 10 - White bryony leaves are _____ lobed

Solutions are posted to the MSU Extension Invasive Rangeland Weed website:
<http://www.msuextension.org/invasiveplantsMangold/extensionsub.html>

