

Whitetop
Cardaria draba

Currently in Montana, noxious weeds infest about 7.6 million acres (Montana's Noxious Weed Management Plan, 2008). Many of these state listed noxious weeds were brought to America as ornamentals for gardens, medicinal purposes, by accident in discarded soil from a ship's ballast or unintentionally in bags of seed brought from other parts of the world. Whatever the cause of introduction, 32 non-native plant species have found their way onto Montana's state noxious weed list.

Whitetop (*Cardaria draba*), is a Priority 2B listed noxious weed in the state of Montana. Priority 2B species are noxious weeds that are abundant in Montana and widespread in many counties. Management criteria for these species includes eradication or containment where these species are less abundant. Management for these species shall be prioritized by local weed districts. Species listed as Priority 2B noxious weeds are: Canada thistle, field bindweed, leafy spurge, whitetop, Russian knapweed, spotted knapweed, diffuse knapweed, dalmation toadflax, St. Johnswort, sulfur cinquefoil, common tansy, oxeye daisy, houndstongue, yellow toadflax, and saltcedar.

Whitetop is native to Russia and Eurasia and was accidentally introduced into the United States in contaminated crop seed in the early 1900's. Whitetop was first discovered in Gallatin County in 1916. Whitetop typically inhabits open, un-shaded areas that have been recently disturbed. These areas include over grazed pastures, waste areas, roadsides, and open grasslands.

Whitetop is a member of the mustard family and can grow up to 2 feet in height with creeping rhizomatous roots that can extend 2 feet down and up to 12 feet out. The plant is silvery gray-green in color and its leaves are covered with fine hairs and are lance to arrowhead in shape. The lower leaves are stalked and the upper leaves clasp the stem. Whitetop produces numerous white flowers that have 4 petals on ½" long stalks. These dense clusters of flowers create a white, flat topped appearance. One whitetop is capable of producing 1,200 to 4,800 seeds. Seeds produced in fruiting pods (silicles) that contain 2 chambers, each capable of producing one seed. Seeds are oval in shape and reddish brown in color and measure 1.5 to 2 mm. Seeds can remain viable in the soil for up to 4 years! Seeds are dispersed when the side wall of the silicle ruptures or when the silicles fall to the ground. Seeds germinate in the fall or the spring.

Whitetop is difficult to control because it can reproduce through its rhizomatous roots as well as through its seeds. Whitetop often requires many years of repetitive treatments; integrated weed management techniques such as hand pulling and herbicides work best in controlling whitetop.

Please take a few moments to learn about whitetop and each of the other state listed noxious weeds. If noxious weeds are not currently a problem in your area, they may be in the near future. For more information about Montana's state listed noxious weeds, regulated plants, or weed species listed on your county weed list, please contact your local county weed district (can list weed district name here... ex: Lewis & Clark County Weed District) at (406) (Phone number). Or you can contact the Montana Department of Agriculture at (406) 444-3144.