CHEATGRASS & FOXTAIL

Top, Middle: Mature cheatgrass during and after curing
Bottom: Mature foxtail

Scientific names: Bromus tectorum (cheatgrass); Hordeum murinum and Hordeum jubatum (foxtail)

Identification

Cheatgrass and foxtail are invasive annual grasses rampant across the West. Before seedset, cheatgrass is a bright green, downy grass that may have a corkscrew twist and purple coloration at its base. Foxtail before seedset closely resembles cheatgrass. After seedset, cheatgrass has a heavy, nodding seedhead that turns from green in early spring to yellow, brown, or purple by early summer. Foxtail has long seedheads covered in dense, spiky stalks and tends to grow near water.

Life cycle

As winter annuals, cheatgrass and foxtail germinate in the fall. They resume growing over the winter and set seed as soon as it starts to warm up in early spring. By early summer, the plants have died and dried out.

The issue

Dry cheatgrass and foxtail are fine fuels that burn hot and fast. They can spread fire across landscapes lightning-quick. Plus, these plants dominate landscapes, crowding out native plants.

Primary treatment

The most effective way to permanently reduce winter annuals like cheatgrass and foxtail is to treat them in late winter, after sprouting but before seedset. Treatment at this time — whether mechanical removal or herbicide application — will reduce the seedbank, which over time will reduce the number of plants that can germinate. Catching them before seedset is **critical!**

Secondary treatment

After these grasses have set seed, it's too late to reduce the seedbank because herbicide will not kill seeds. However, fire risk can still be reduced by mowing or string-trimming plants.

CHEATGRASS & FOXTAIL *Treatment*

1. For **young plants** before seedset: Herbicide or pull

Why we recommend this
These treatments will kill plants before they have set seed, both lowering wildfire risk *and* reducing weeds for next year. If done properly, treatment should become easier each year and require less herbicide (if using). Plus, using herbicide in the winter reduces impacts on other plants, which are largely dormant.

Timing
Winter, after plants have sprouted but before they have set seed. **Timing is critical,** especially when using herbicide — it is useless to apply after seedset, since herbicide doesn't kill seeds. *Note that the ground cannot be frozen when applying herbicide.*

Materials
Herbicide: Herbicide/dye, applicator, PPE
Pulling: Grubber or hoe and trash bags.

Instructions (mechanical removal)
1. Using hands or a tool like a grubber or hoe, remove plants.
2. Store plants in bags or secure containers for disposal.

Instructions (herbicide)
1. Prepare herbicide per label and add to spraying device.
2. Spray cheatgrass/foxtail, avoiding any desirable plants.

Cheatgrass in February, after germination but before seedset. Foxtail closely resembles cheatgrass at this stage.

2. For **adult plants** after seedset: Mow or string-trim

Why we recommend this
This treatment method won't reduce weeds for next year, but it will reduce wildfire risk by cutting down fire fuels.

Timing
Spring to early summer — as soon as possible after plants have set seed. If treating in dry conditions, use a string trimmer rather than anything with a metal blade, which could throw sparks.

Materials
Mower or string trimmer. Trash bags for disposal.

Instructions
1. Mow or trim plants.
2. Store clippings in bags or secure containers for disposal.

Cheatgrass and foxtail after seedset.

For large infestations of cheatgrass or foxtail, mulching can also be an effective treatment. Smother the grasses at any time of year with at least 4" of mulch.