

Foxtail

Introduction

Foxtail barley (foxtail), a type of native perennial grass, has increased within Regina City limits in recent years, with varying concentrations found in parks and open spaces, as well as in partially developed and un-serviced land holdings.

The City of Regina has received many complaints regarding foxtail. In response, the City is managing current problem areas while taking a proactive approach to minimize the future occurrence of foxtail. This includes creating awareness and educating developers and landowners on the foxtail issues in Regina and sharing viable control techniques.

What is foxtail barley?

Foxtail barley (*Hordeum jubatum* L.), designated as a nuisance weed under the Weed Control Act, 2010 is a short-lived native perennial grass with a shallow, fibrous root system that reproduces by seed. Narrow leaves grow in a clump and seeds have long fine brush-like hairs which make the seed head look like a "tail:"

The seed heads appear fuzzy and are green to reddish in colour during development and a shiny cream colour when mature. The mature seed head breaks into seven-bristled clusters, providing effective dispersal by wind or on the coats of pets or other animals.

Adapting to a wide range of environmental conditions, foxtail has been found from Newfoundland to the Yukon, and flourishes on disturbed and un-serviced land and pastures. It is one of the few prairie weeds native to the region, growing well in all soil types, including saline soil. It is also referred to as wild barley, skunk-tail grass or tickle grass.

What issues does foxtail cause?

Foxtail matures in summer, typically in July. At maturity, the seed heads of foxtail break up and are sharp. The barbed seed heads can become lodged in the skin, mouth, nose and eyes of dogs and other domestic animals causing severe harm. If digested, the barbed seed heads can embed in soft tissues and lead to infection and even death.

Foxtail is also a nuisance for people; they can work through clothing, especially fabric shoes and socks, causing discomfort to people while walking. Foxtail can also make it difficult for new homeowners wanting to establish landscaping.



How can foxtail be controlled?

Foxtail produces thousands of seeds per plant, and the seeds primarily germinate in cool moist soil in April, May, September and October. Seeds remain viable for about two to three years, therefore controlling foxtail requires a multi-year strategy.

There are timely control techniques that landowners are encouraged to apply, such as mowing, cover crops and tillage.

BEST PRACTICE - Mowing: Mowing prior to seed development prevents seed set, therefore mowing is recommended in late May to early June. Mowing for a second time later in the season may be required for maintenance and prevention. Once seeds develop, mowing, bagging, and disposing of seed heads is necessary. To prevent the formation of viable seeds, mowing should be conducted within 10 days of seed head emergence.

Cover crops: For large areas, a cover crop that can compete with foxtail can be planted to start reclaiming affected areas. By planting cover crops, you can reduce the density of weed populations as well as the size of the weeds. Some examples of cover crops include alfalfa, clover, oats and rye. Cover crops are best grown in early May, as late-season cover crops may not have enough heat available to grow and provide any benefit. You may not achieve control right away, but you will get some suppression.

Tillage: Foxtail can be exceptionally well controlled with tillage because of its shallow, fibrous root system. It isn't necessary to turn the soil over, simply going in and undercutting it can be very effective. Tillage is better in fall than spring.

What supports and resources are available?

Signage and prevention:

As mentioned previously, foxtail poses significant health risks to pets; therefore, the City has placed signage in parks and open space areas alerting pet owners where foxtail is present. Some preventative measures for residents with dogs, include:

- Brushing your dog after being outdoors
- Keep your dog on a leash
- Checking their ears and paws daily
- Using a netted muzzle or field guard

Additional Resources:

For more information on prohibited, noxious and nuisance weeds, visit:

- Saskatchewan's *Weed Control Act, 2010* - includes the duties of the weed inspector, owners and occupants, fines and penalties, as well as a listing of plants designated as prohibited, noxious and nuisance weeds in Saskatchewan.
- *Saskatchewan's Urban Guide to Weed Control* - includes weed identification and management tips.

How do I submit a concern?

If you would like to report a weed concern, please contact Service Regina by visiting our website at Regina.ca/servicerequest or by calling 306-777-7000.

Source: Foxtail Be Gone: A Guide to Preventing and Controlling Foxtail Barley – City of Saskatoon

Watch for Foxtails

**Foxtails are a
health risk to pets.**

**Avoid foxtail areas where
possible and examine your
pet after being outdoors.**

The City is aware there is foxtail in this area and
is actively working to mitigate the problem.