

Cheatgrass

Bromus tectorum

Other Common Names: Downy brome, bronco grass

Species Affected: horses, cattle, hunting dogs & pets, wildlife

Description: Cheatgrass is an invasive annual which germinates in the fall or in the spring and can grow anywhere from 6" to 30" tall. Because it usually germinates the previous fall, cheatgrass is able to get a head start on native grasses in the spring. Stems are hairy/downy, especially when plants are young. Leaf blades are flat and the inflorescences/panicles (flower clusters) droop to one side. The seeds form awns roughly half an inch long. The plants turn a purple color at maturity then dry out a light tan/beige color. Cheatgrass is highly flammable and makes excellent fuel for wildfires.

Growing Location: Cheatgrass now grows throughout the United States, and as of 2013 was estimated to infest more than 101 million acres in this country (a condensed area larger than the state of Montana). It grows well in a wide range of habitats, from riparian zones to uplands, rangelands, roadsides, and disturbed sites. It is most abundant in dry soils, which compounds the danger it poses as a fire hazard.

Toxin: Cheatgrass does not contain a toxin but rather is physically injurious.

Toxic Plant Parts: While grazing animals will eat cheatgrass prior to seed set, palatability drops when seeds begin to form, and the seeds with their long sharp awns are dangerous for any animals who come in contact with them.

Possible Effects on Livestock & Other Animals: Cheatgrass's barbed seed awns can become lodged in dogs' or grazing animals' noses, mouths, ears, feet, or virtually anywhere on the body, and slowly work their way deeper in over time. They have even been found inside animals' brains during autopsies. Symptoms can include drooling, coughing, bloody saliva, throat infections, difficulty chewing, weight loss, mouth ulcers and abscesses, and colic in horses.

Preventative Measures: If cheatgrass has already gone to seed, avoid moving animals through the area if at all possible, and if that is not possible then check animals for awns and remove them. Rejuvra (indaziflam) herbicide is very effective on invasive annual grasses such as cheatgrass, contact our office to find out if this is a good option for your property and to learn about other control options.

Resources: [A Homeowner's Guide to Cheatgrass | Extension | University of Nevada, Reno \(unr.edu\)](#)
[cheatgrass management handbook 0.pdf \(usda.gov\)](#)

[Cheatgrass - Weed and Invasive Plant Ecology and Management Group | Montana State University](#)

[Why Is Cheatgrass Bad? | Working Lands For Wildlife \(wlfw.org\)](#)

[Cheatgrass and Medusahead | U.S. Geological Survey \(usgs.gov\)](#)

https://eplanning.blm.gov/public_projects/124311/200321145/20023235/250029439/TPG_Final_EA_Appendix_I_508.pdf

ALL PHOTOS CREDIT: UW/CSU *Cheatgrass Management Handbook*, August 2013

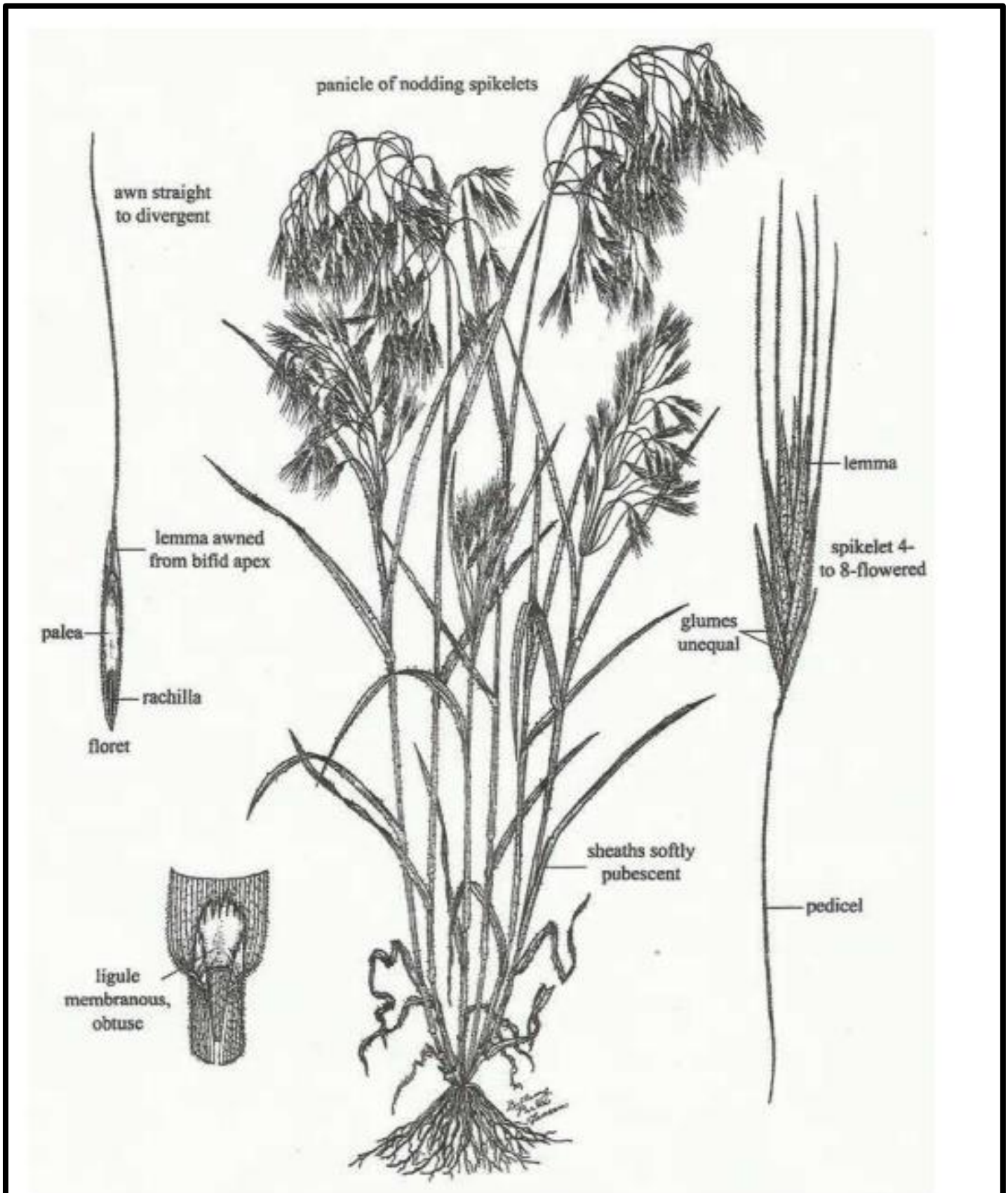


Figure 1-1. Cheatgrass illustration; adapted from Stubbendieck et al. (2011).

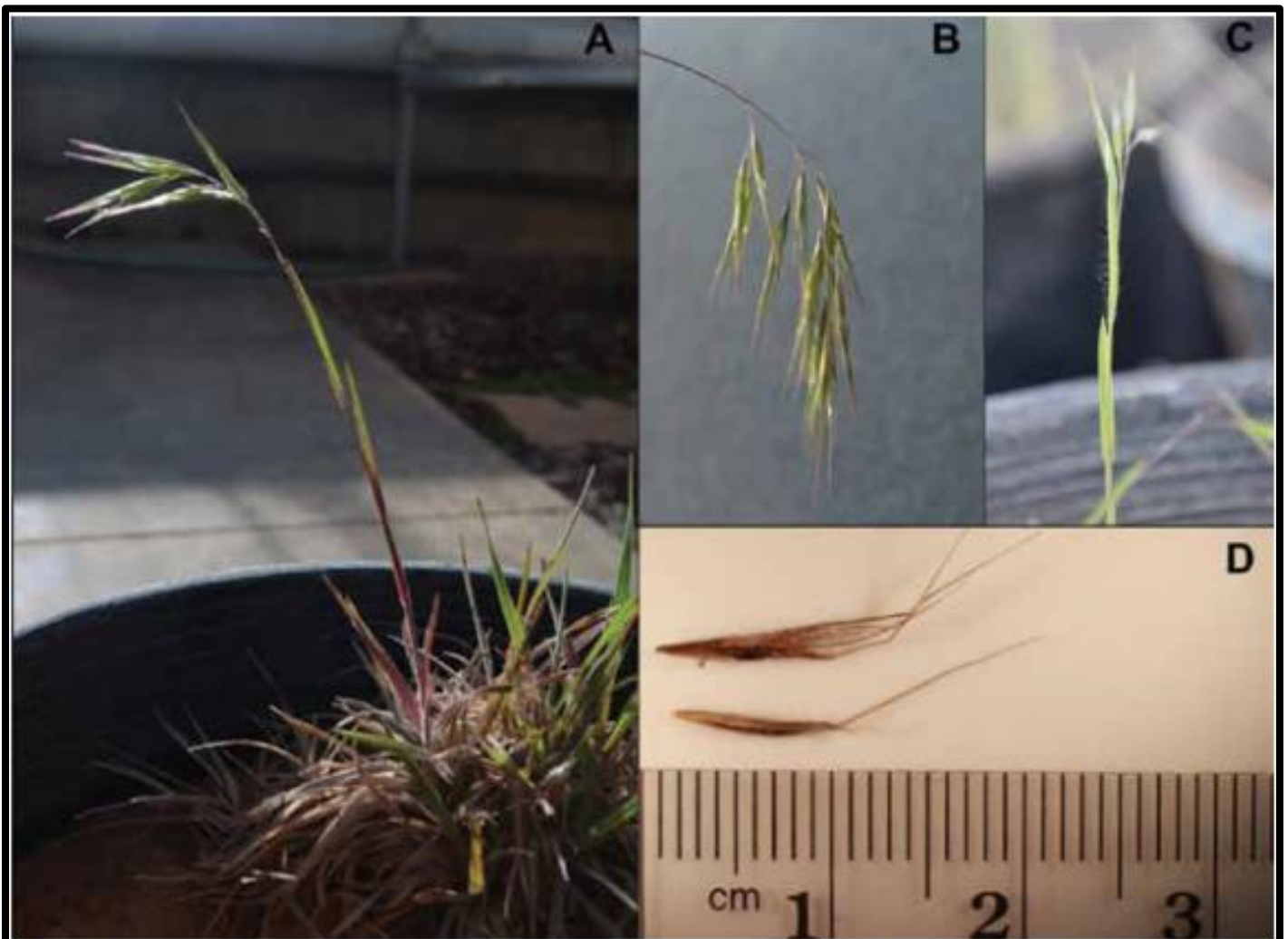


Figure 1-2. A) cheatgrass plant and its identifying characteristics, including B) the inflorescence, C) the pubescent leaves, and D) the floret (top) and seed (bottom).