

Weeds: Horsetail: *Equisetum* spp.



Use IPM (Integrated Pest Management) for most successful weed management.

Family: Equisetaceae
Cycle: Perennial
Plant Type: Other

Biology

Description: Field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) grows from a perennial, creeping root system. The rhizomes are brown, somewhat woolly, and bear small tubers. Two types of stems emerge in the spring. Tiny modified leaves form black "teeth" at the nodes of the stems. Fertile stems (6-12 inches tall) are tan, jointed, and unbranched, with an inch-long, spore-bearing "cone" at the tip. Sterile stems (12-18 inches tall) are green and slender, with green whorls of leafless, four-angled, fine branches at each joint. Both types of stems are rough to the touch, because the plants accumulate silica in the stems. Sterile stems die back in the fall. The root system extends deep into the soil and spreads extensively, making this species very difficult to control. Giant horsetail (*E. telmateia*) closely resembles field horsetail, but is taller, with more and larger (18 inches or more) fertile stems in the spring. Giant horsetail "cones" reach up to four inches long. Scouring rush (*E. hyemale*) has only fertile stems. All stems are green, unbranched, and produce small "cones" at the tips. The stems can reach four feet in height and frequently remain green through the winter. Special information: All species of horsetails are considered toxic to livestock.

Habitat: Horsetails are found primarily in moist to wet areas. Scouring rush (*E. hyemale*) is common along roadsides and ditchbanks. Field horsetail is found primarily in moist to wet areas, but can survive in drier areas once established. Field horsetail is a common weed of gardens, pastures, and home landscape situations.

Management Options

- Inorganic mulches, such as plastic, commercial "weed barrier" fabrics and other materials such as roofing paper, is an effective weed management option. Cover inorganic mulches with a thin layer of soil or organic mulch.
- Maintaining a healthy planting or turf area to provide competition will prevent weed establishment.
- Reduce weed infestation by handpulling weeds.
- Chemical management options are outlined in the PNW Weed Management Handbook available through WSU at 1-800-723-1763. There is also information for home gardeners at <http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense>.