Medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*)

**Description**

Grows 15-45 cm tall, with a fibrous root. A narrow-leaved annual grass with long-awned spike inflorescence. Produces tillers, but very few narrow leaves. Spike inflorescence has stiff, long awns or bristles that can be 2-7cm long, finely barbed and can irritate mouths of livestock. Stems are hairy. Seed will twist as fruit matures, usually 7 seeds per spike. Entire inflorescence falls, releasing seeds from within florets—does not break apart like foxtail barley. Spikelets are 2 per node. Lemma narrowly lanceolate, 3-veined, tapered into a straight to curved awn. Glumes awn-like also, 1-4 cm long, straight to slightly curved.

**Key Identifiers**

- Medusahead matures 2-4 weeks later in the season than most other annual grasses
- Seedlings remain attached to the long-awned florets
- 3 veined lemmas
- Main axis of flower spike does not break apart in fruit
- Medusahead has 2 types of awns: both are flat, but the longer of the 2 contains barbs that point upward
- awns are straight and compressed when green, becoming twisted and erratically spread upon drying

**Location in Canada**

Reports have Medusahead in much of the western US and Canada. Reports in Alberta have not been made, to the best of my knowledge.

**Resources**


**Similar species**

Unlike Medusahead, similar appearing *Hordeum* and *Elymus* species have 5-veined lemmas and main flower spike axes that typically break apart in fruit. In addition, *Hordeum* species have 3 florets per spikelet, with the lateral florets much smaller than the central floret.