

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

<http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/plant/ipc/weedinfo/taeniatherum-caput-medusae.htm>

<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/graminoid/taecap/all.html>

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.



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