



Yellow bristle grass

WHAT YOU SEE IN SUMMER:

kids on holidays, the beach, ice cream, barbecues.

WHAT I SEE IN SUMMER:

yellow bristle grass.

Yellow bristle grass (*Setaria pumila* or YBG) comes from a family of annual grasses, which includes foxtails and millets. It's originally from Asia and has spread through Europe, North America and Australasia.

Over the last few years, possibly driven by the 'pugging' or compaction of wet soil in winter, YBG has spread through Taranaki, Waikato, Auckland, and the Bay of Plenty, moving from roadsides into pasture.

YBG is a C4 photosynthetic plant. This means it grows more vigorously at higher temperatures than nutritious pasture plants like ryegrass and clover. It spreads during summer dry periods, then dies out in winter, leaving bare patches of soil. These tend to grow weeds, and become reinfested with YBG in spring.

YBG seeds germinate from mid-October (when soils are about 16°C), peaking by mid-November (when soil temperature is over 20°C). This is similar to other C4 weeds such as summer grass, crowsfoot grass and smooth witchgrass. However, YBG is far more invasive and competitive due to its size and seed numbers per plant.

Seed heads appear from late December through to February. Once they do, it's too late to spray as their hard coating protects them. They disperse in water, hay, on animals, and in contaminated crops like maize. They lay dormant for about three months before they can germinate. However,



Photo: Harry Rose, Wikimedia Commons

Why is it a weed?
Invasive grass weed that out-grows and colonises pasture during summer months

Where is it found?
All over the North island, mainly Auckland, Waikato, Taranaki and Bay of Plenty

Is it toxic?
No



Photo: Matt Lavin, Wikimedia Commons



Photo: Stefan Lefnaer, Wikimedia Commons

germination is driven by soil temperature, so you won't see the worst of an infestation until the following spring.

The seeds can last in the soil for up to 10 years, but are generally only viable for a few years.

4 tips for controlling yellow bristle grass

- Learn to identify YBG and recognise how it differs from other summer grasses, especially at the vegetative growth stage. It's most recognisable feature is its bright red stem base. Once identified, you can then isolate the area and treat accordingly.
- Avoid mowing or grazing off 'good' pasture plants during YBG's key germination time (October to December).
- Prevent seed-heads from forming. You can mow or graze YBG before the seed-heads appear. This is important as these hardy seeds will pass through the stomachs of livestock and germinate the following spring.
- YBG in pasture or crops (maize, brassica etc) can be targeted with selective herbicides. These will kill it and other summer grass weeds before they get to the seed-head stage, without damaging pasture or crops. Visit your local farm supply store for guidance.

About Gary

Gary Bosley works as PGG Wrightson's North Island technical specialist in agronomy. He and his family live on a 4ha lifestyle block south-east of Auckland.

