EB2038E

Ventenata

Introduction

Ventenata (*Ventenata dubia* (Leers) Coss.) is a relatively new weed to the Pacific Northwest that is rapidly infesting newly seeded and poorly managed grass areas. It originates from the Mediterranean region and is also known as North Africa grass or wiregrass. Although it was first documented in the U.S. in Washington State in 1952, it hasn't attracted a lot of attention until recently.

Ventenata infestations seriously degrade the quality of hay, pastures, and CRP fields, as well as native range and transitional forest habitats. It has no known forage value for livestock or wildlife, causes soil to be prone to erosion due to its shallow rooting depth, limits the function of waterways, and reduces land values. Ventenata can be difficult to control with common weed management tools such as foliar herbicides, tillage, and mowing, and therefore requires more integrated methods for effective control.

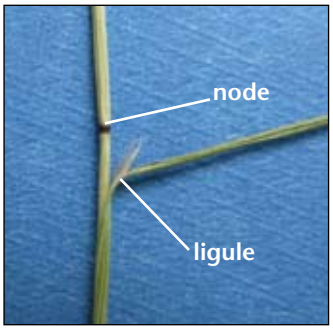
Ventenata (light brown plant in photo) invades ground that is exposed due to poor stand establishment, erosion, or declining stand health. (Pamela Scheinost, NRCS Pullman PMC)

How to Identify Ventenata

Ventenata is a winter annual grass that germinates in the late fall and produces a seed head the following spring, about one month after annual weedy brome species (cheatgrass). Ventenata grows to be 6–18" tall and has several distinguishing characteristics:

Early Season (May–June)

- Plants are vibrant green.
- Nodes are dark red or black.
- Ligules are unusually long (1–8 mm).
- Roots are shallow.



To identify ventenata in the spring, look for a dark red or black node and long ligule. (Pamela Scheinost, NRCS Pullman PMC)

Late Season (June–August)

- Plants are silvery-green, then turn tan.
- Stems are wiry with few leaves.
- Panicles are open.
- Awns are bent when dry.

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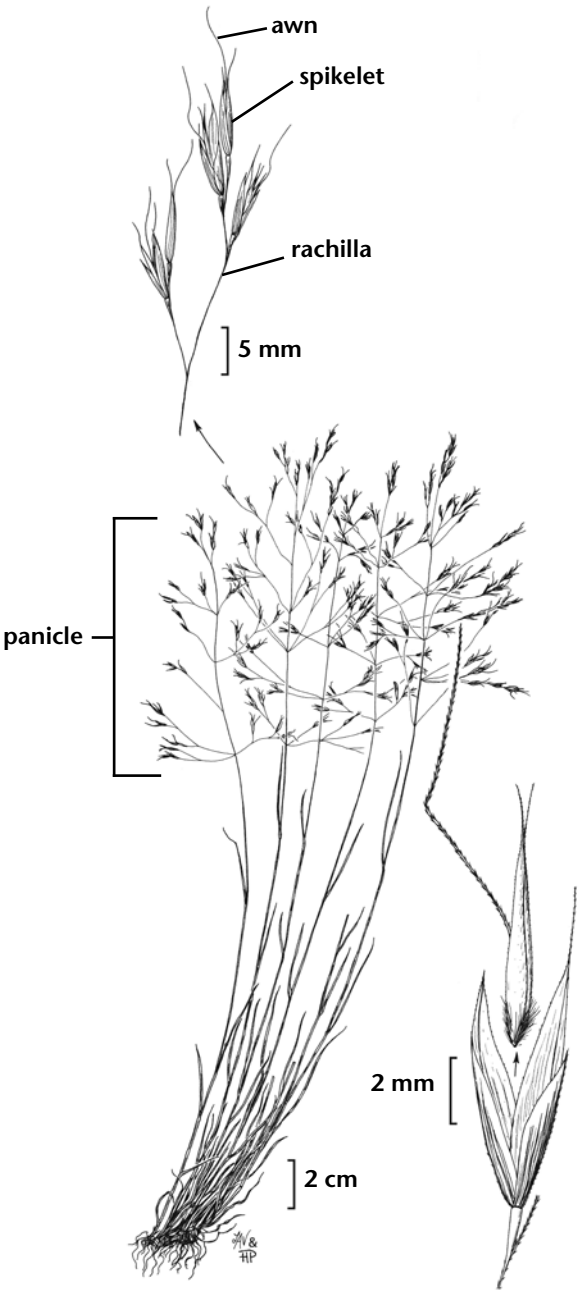

To identify ventenata in the summer, look for an open panicle with 1–3 spikelets at the end of each rachilla and bent awns. Illustration courtesy of Linda Vorobik, Hana Pazdírková, and Utah State University.

Methods of Ventenata Control

Prevention

1) Clean equipment prior to leaving ventenata-infested fields.

2) Maintain competitive stands of perennial vegetation by fertilizing, following a grazing plan, and seeding bare areas with weed-free seed.

Once established

1) Apply a soil-active herbicide in the late fall. Preliminary research has also shown fertilization in the spring and fall during the year following an application of herbicide can help perennial grasses recover from herbicide damage and be more competitive. Consult with your county weed supervisor, university Extension agent, or certified crop advisor for herbicide recommendations.

2) Keep ventenata at a 2" height or less until soil moisture is unavailable to prevent seed production.

Important: Ventenata seed is believed to persist in the soil for only 2–3 years; therefore, 3–4 years of aggressive management should severely reduce an infestation.

Problems Associated with Managing Ventenata

Ventenata often sends up a second flush of seed heads following a mowing. If mowed while the plants are heading, the tough stems can become tangled in the mower or swather (hence the name wiregrass) and cause damage to bearings or other parts of the mower. Ventenata is believed to be tolerant to spring-applied glyphosate, sethoxydim, and other foliar herbicides, leaving the selection of herbicides limited. Fire may enhance ventenata populations by increasing germination and producing exposed soil. Ongoing research should clarify some of these uncertainties, with results expected by fall 2009 at *http://pubs.wsu.edu*.

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Use pesticides with care. Apply them only to plants, animals, or sites listed on the label. When mixing and applying pesticides, follow all label precautions to protect yourself and others around you. It is a violation of the law to disregard label directions. If pesticides are spilled on skin or clothing, remove clothing and wash skin thoroughly. Store pesticides in their original containers and keep them out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock.

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