

“B” Rated Weeds

A weed of economic importance which is regionally abundant,
but may have limited distribution in some counties

Johnsongrass
Sorghum halepense

Other common names: Johnson grass

USDA symbol: SOHA
ODA rating: B



Introduction: Native to the Mediterranean region, johnsongrass was introduced into North America as a forage crop and for erosion control. It can be highly invasive in cultivated agriculture though new generation herbicides have offered excellent control.

Distribution in Oregon: Small populations are scattered throughout much of Oregon.

Description: Johnsongrass is a perennial grass that grows three to six feet tall. Leaf blades are flat with a prominent white midvein. The stems are solid with prominent, swollen nodes. Flowers or spikelets are in pairs at the lower end of the flowering stalk, and in threes at the upper end. Johnsongrass has fibrous roots and extensive, thick creeping rhizomes. It grows in dense clumps or nearly solid stands competing with crops for light, water and nutrients. It reproduces by both seeds and rhizomes. A large single plant may produce hundreds to over a thousand seeds per year.

Impacts: Johnsongrass is one of the world's worst weeds. It is extremely competitive and a serious weed in corn production and other cash crops. Newer herbicides have reduced its impact in many crops but significant efforts are still directed at controlling this plant. Johnsongrass is an alternate host to corn leaf gall, maize dwarf mosaic, wheat streak mosaic, and beet yellows viruses; it also harbors sorghum midge, an insect pest of cultivated sorghum. It has been reported that livestock grazing on large amounts of young, stressed, or herbicide treated Johnsongrass are at risk of hydrogen cyanide poisoning. The foliage can cause 'bloat' in such herbivores from accumulation of excessive nitrates.

Biological controls: No approved biological control agents.

