

What the Heck is This Wiry Weed Taking Over?

It can be found growing in pastures, fields, vacant areas, driveways, and orchards. Usually low to the ground, with small leaves that alternately grow from one side of the stem to the other. The plant also has strong, wiry stems that get tangled up in tools and are hard to break.

Chances are this weed is Prostrate Knotweed (*Polygonum aviculare*). It has also been called “wiregrass” and “wireweed.”



Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org

Sometimes the plant can be confused with Prostrate Spurge (*Euphorbia maculata*). But it is very easy to tell them apart. The stems of Prostrate Spurge will break relatively easily (not so with Prostrate Knotweed!) and will bleed a milky sap. Careful, the milky sap can be toxic and cause skin irritations.

Prostrate Knotweed (*P. aviculare*) is native to Europe/Eurasia and can grow in Colorado between 5,000 and 9,500 feet in elevation. It is a matting summer annual (germinates in Spring and dies at the end of the season) that can grow 1 to 3 feet tall in cultivated fields. Flowers are small and inconspicuous, white to pinkish, that grow where the leaves attach to the stem. Prostrate Knotweed is salt tolerant and grows well in compacted soils. This makes the weed

quite competitive in these conditions. Generally considered a “nuisance weed” it is not on the State or Montezuma County Noxious Weed Lists.

So, what can be done about this “nuisance weed?” For annual weeds, the best strategy is to control the plant and control seed production. Prevention is always best and less costly than “the cure.” Try to avoid/remedy soil compaction as much as possible. If the weed is established in the area, pre-emergent herbicides can be used in the Spring before the weed germinates. Timing can be tricky with pre-emergent herbicides, so be careful to read and follow the herbicide label. If the population is small, hand-pulling (before the plant flowers) can be effective. But be prepared for a struggle with the strong, wiry stems. If using a post-emergent herbicide, best control is achieved when application is early in the season (late-spring or early-summer) and used with a “sticker – spreader” additive. 2, 4-D is selective for broad-leaved weeds and although Glyphosate, Dicamba, and Imazapyr can also be effective, the last three are broad-spectrum herbicides and will kill grass too. With any herbicide you choose to use, be sure to use it in accordance with the label and read/follow the label instructions. Remember, proper identification of the weed is the first step in successful weed management. If you need additional help, you can contact Tom at the CSU Montezuma County Extension office, 970-565-3123, Tom.Hooten@colostate.edu, or Bonnie or Megan at the County Weed Department, 970-565-0580, BLoving@co.montezuma.co.us or MHorn@co.montezuma.co.us.