JOHNSONGRASS
(Sorghum halepense)

D. G. Swan, Extension Weed Scientist

Plant: Coarse perennial, 2 to 6 feet tall with long, stout rhizomes. Stems about 1/2-inch thick, pithy, with sweet juice; nodes on the stem swollen.
Leaves: Often 12 inches long and at least 1/2-inch wide with a heavy midvein.
Seed head: A green or purplish panicle from 6 to 20 inches long, branches in whorls.
Spikelets: In groups of 2 or 3, only one developing a seed; one of each group with a bent awn about 5/8-inch long; outer bract covered with very fine, silky hairs.
Seed: About 1/8-inch long, pointed, dark brown, shiny.

Johnsongrass, spreading as it does by creeping roots and seeds, is very difficult to control. It is not a native grass and the following story of its introduction is typical of how plants are scattered over the world.

During the 1830s, an American spent some time in Turkey helping that country in its cotton culture. When he returned to his home in the South, he brought seeds of plants that seemed promising as crops, among them a vigorous grass. A southern planter named Johnson was given some of the grass seed to plant on his river-bottom plantation. It grew very well and soon had spread over much of the South. It is now found in most parts of our country where the winters are not extremely cold. Johnsongrass sometimes develops an acid which is poisonous to stock.

Prevent Infestation
1. Use crop seed, hay, and straw that is free of johnsongrass seed.
2. Clean equipment before moving from a johnsongrass-infested area.
3. Do not let johnsongrass develop seed.
4. Destroy johnsongrass plants as they appear.

ERADICATE JOHNSONGRASS IN WASHINGTON STATE

Eradication in Noncrop Areas

SOIL-RESIDUAL HERBICIDES

Diuron (Karmex) or monuron (Telvar): Use 2 ounces of the product per 100 square feet.

Borate-chlorate mixtures: Follow the label.

Rainfall or irrigation is necessary to fix residual materials in the soil. Repeat treatments at a reduced rate as necessary.

FOLIAGE-ACTIVE HERBICIDES

Glyphosate (Roundup): Use 1 quart of the product in 20 gallons of water and spray to wet. Treat when the johnsongrass is headed or when regrowth is at least 18 inches high. Treat when in a succulent condition. Weeds under stress or too mature are not as effectively controlled.

Dalapon (Dowpon-M): Use 1 pound of the product in 10 gallons of water and spray to wet. Make first application when grass is 18 to 24 inches high. Repeat treatment on new shoot growth every five weeks.

When you select a treatment, READ AND STUDY THE LABEL.

Color photos from University of California Growers Weed Identification Handbook.
JOHNSONGRASS - Sorghum halepense (L.) Pers.

ROOTS AND RHIZOME

MATURE

COLLAR REGION

PANICLE