



A winter weed - - still here but best forgotten: Mediterraneangrass *(Schismus barbatus).*

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In the low desert, winter annual weeds germinate in the early fall, grow vegetatively from November to February, and then flower, set seeds, and die in the spring.

The overall plant size and population density of winter annual weeds in an unirrigated landscape often depends on the amount of rainfall.

When there is little rain, winter annuals can go unnoticed. In times of high winter rainfall, they can suddenly become a visual nightmare.

Such is the case with the winter annual weed, Mediterraneangrass (*Schismus barbatus*). It is also called “six weeks Schismus”.

Mediterraneangrass is a bunchgrass that produces vegetative shoots by tillering. It has no underground rhizomes or above ground stolons. In late October and November, individual plants produce small rosettes, ranging in size from a nickel to quarter. With adequate winter rain, the plants enlarge and rapidly tiller reaching 2 to 3-½ inches in diameter.

This species is not competitive, and often there are only 2 to 3 plants per square foot. Halfway through its short lifespan, short flower heads will appear in the form of panicles. The seed heads often emerge in a radial pattern, just above the green leaves close to the ground. Other plants send up almost vertical seed heads. The seed heads bring attention to the layperson, which now validates its presence as a distraction in the landscape. Postemergence herbicide weed control is possible early, but is not practical since the mature weed is rapidly declining after it has reached the flower stage. Mediterranean grass does not tolerate hot air temperatures. After several days of 85°F or hotter air temperatures, the plants will wither and die. If a small population of weeds is unsightly in a xeriscape setting, simply remove the plant and with a shovel or hula hoe. Mediterranean grass has a very shallow and weak root system which makes it is easy to mechanically remove.

In larger areas or highly infested landscapes, hand-hoeing may not be possible. The same is true for infestations in xeriscapes that feature large diameter rock mulch or gravel. In these situations, a postemergence herbicide such as RoundUp* (glyphosate), Finale* (glufosinate), Scythe* (pelargonic acid), or Reward* (diquat) can be used for eliminating the grass and other weeds. In areas where Mediterranean grass is a repeated problem year after year, a grass herbicide should be applied in late September through October to prevent this weed from emerging.

Photos (property of author).



Figure 1. A small Mediterranean grass plant, typical size by late December or early January



Figure 2. Group of mature Mediterranean grass plants by garden wall.



Figure 3. Flower head (panicles).



Figure 4. Note: shallow roots, yet large overall plant size.



Figure 5. Monostand of Mediterranean grass in a gravel hardscape.



Figure 6. Small plants mowed with weed-eater several times in a gravel mulch xeriscape.



Figure 7. Contrast between late flowering (green) (right center) and early flowering (straw brown) (left) plants of *Schismus barbatus*.

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