

WINTERGRASS

Poa annua



Photographs are courtesy of Dr Sheldon Navie

Description & life cycle

A native of Europe, Wintergrass (also known as *Poa annua*) is widely distributed throughout the civilised regions of the world. Wintergrass is an annual or short-lived perennial.

Wintergrass readily germinates from seed in the autumn and winter months. Seed production is prolific, with records of up to 360 seeds being produced per plant between July and August. These seeds are readily dispersed by adhering to animals or via mud and dung.

Wintergrass has a network of very fine roots that can easily invade and out-compete the root system of turf species. Even after a successful treatment, the root system may remain for several years.

Seed-heads are open and branched with numerous greenish or whitish flower spikelets. Each flower spikelet has three to four tiny flowers. Wintergrass leaves are light green in colour and soft in texture.

Wintergrass can grow up to 30cm high, but is usually much smaller with a tufted habit and is able to adapt to mowing heights as low as 3mm. It has upright or spreading stems that usually do not produce roots at their joints.

Key features

- > Prolific seed producer even at cutting heights below 10 mm
- > Seeds are viable 1 to 2 days after pollination
- > Fine root system which out-competes desirable turf species

Control

1. Wintergrass is one of the few turfgrass weeds that can be effectively controlled using pre-emergent herbicides. These include products containing the active ingredients Propyzamide, Dithiopyr, Pendimethalin and Oxadiazon. They should generally be applied during autumn, before minimum temperatures reach 10-16 degrees and germination occurs.
2. A post-emergent herbicide such as Monument or Colosseum can be used to selectively control established Wintergrass plants in most couch grass areas.