Whitman County Extension
Weeds

Washington State University
WHITMAN COUNTY EXTENSION

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STEVE'S Weed of the Month

Yellow Nutsedge

Also Known As: chufa, chufa flatsedge, nutgrass, yellow nutgrass, swampgrass, coco, coco-nut, earth-almond, northern nutgrass, rush nut, tiger nut.

Yellow Nutsedge is a **Class B Noxious Weeds**: Non-native species that are either absent from or limited in distribution in some portions of the state but very abundant in other areas. The goals are to **contain** the plants where they are already widespread and **prevent** their spread into new areas.

Yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus* L.), native to North America and Eurasia, is an erect, fibrous-rooted perennial that looks like a type of grass, but is actually a sedge. It grows 1—3 feet tall. The narrow, shiny grass-like leaves are yellow-green and prominently veined; they emanate from the base of a stout, triangular stem in sets of three. Yellow nutsedge has an umbel-like inflorescence; stalks arising from a common point bear yellowish flowers arranged in narrow, flat-topped spikelets. Long leaf-like bracts radiate from beneath the inflorescence. Seeds are yellowish-brown, oblong and three-angled.

Yellow nutsedge has an extensive underground system comprised of rhizomes, basal bulbs and tubers that serve as the plant's primary means of reproduction. The tuber-bearing rootstocks store large reserves of energy, enabling the plant to overwinter in temperate climates and produce new shoots in the spring. The tubers are dark, somewhat globe-shaped and edible, tasting like almonds. Buds on the tubers sprout and form new plants. Yellow nutsedge also reproduces by seed, although not to the extent its prolific nature would lead one to expect due to low seed viability and seedling vigor.

Yellow nutsedge prefers moist soils. In natural habitats, it grows along the edge of standing water. As a common weed, it is often found in cultivated fields and pastures. Considered one of the world's worst weeds, yellow nutsedge is nearly impossible to eradicate once it infests field crops. It competes for water, light and nutrients, reducing crop yield and quality. Although yellow nutsedge is not a strong competitor of other weeds, herbicides that control those weeds often fail to affect nutsedge tubers, allowing nutsedge to mount a rapid offensive. Tuber densities may reach 12 million per acre on heavily infested fields. (PNW 452)

Photo by: Steve Dewey, Utah State University, Bugwood.org

Photo by: Ohio State weed Lab Archive, The Ohio State University, Bugwood.org

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Photo by: Richard Old, XID Services Inc., Bugwood.org

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Control Methods

The tubers of yellow nutsedge pose a difficult challenge in controlling the plant. Once the plant establishes, control may be attained only through a long-term program that integrates several control methods.

Cultural Control: Because yellow nutsedge does not tolerate shade, high-density planting of competitive crops that grow quickly and form dense canopies can inhibit its spread. For non-cropland, maintaining a healthy cover of perennial plants can suppress yellow nutsedge.

Mechanical/Physical Control: For small infestations, persistent hand pulling of the plant, its root system (especially tubers) and any subsequent regrowth can be effective. Tillage at regular intervals—before plants grow many leaves—can be used to deplete energy reserves stored in the rhizomatous root system. Tillage can also be used to uproot and expose the tubers to the elements so they dry out or freeze.

Chemical Control: Because yellow nutsedge is a member of the sedge family, specific herbicides are required to achieve satisfactory control. Ideally, herbicide applications should occur when nutsedge is young, actively growing, and most vulnerable, typically in late spring or early summer. For sedge control, herbicides must outlast the tubers' ability to resprout, or 10—12 weeks. As stated earlier, once yellow nutsedge establishes it is almost impossible to eradicate. It is a mistake to use systemic herbicides such as glyphosate to try to kill the tubers after plants are mature as little herbicide translocates from leaves to the tubers. Effective herbicides include sulfosulfuron and sulfentrazone. Combining the use of herbicides with other control measures can improve efficacy. Atrazine, bromacil, bentazon, amitrole, oxyfluorfen, glyphosate, EPTC, alachlor, metolachlor, terbacil, pebulate, and MSMA have all been used with varying results on yellow nutsedge.

More information can be found in the
PNW Weed Management Handbook

USE PESTICIDES WITH CARE. Apply them only to plants, animals, or sites listed on the label. When mixing and applying pesticides, follow all label precautions to protect yourself and others around you. It is a violation of the law to disregard label directions. Store pesticides in their original containers and keep them out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock.

Biological control: Although research is being conducted, no biological control agents have been shown to provide consistent control.

Questions: contact Steve Van Vleet or phone (509) 397 - 6290