



Protect your pet against Cheat Grass and Foxtail! Be on the lookout for these tiny and troublesome weeds

Late summer is the time to be on alert for various "invaders" from the plant world. As grasses and weeds dry out and seeds begin to scatter, this can mean trouble for pets (and annoyances for people). Daily checks and quick removal are the key to preventing serious problems in the future.

Cheatgrass, also known as Cheat grass (two words), June Grass, Downy Brome, grass awn, or by the scientific name, *Bromus tectorum L.*, is a potentially dangerous weed common in many parts of North America. It is commonly confused with another dangerous weed, the foxtail. The danger lies in the "invasiveness" of the dry seed pods found in late summer and early fall. These pods have one-way microscopic barbs that allow the seed to work its way into fur, skin, and mucous membranes, but not work itself back out, much like the one-way movement of porcupine quills. Foxtail weeds shed very small black seeds which also work their way into fur, skin, and tissue.

These annoying and troublesome weeds have been found in the skin (i.e. between the toes), eyes, ears, mouth, vulva and even interior body cavities such as lungs and abdomen, causing sometimes very serious punctures and infections. It is important not to underestimate the potential seriousness of this common problem.

Quick removal will reduce or eliminate potential serious and expensive problems. Both cats and dogs are affected, but cats seem to be better at grooming and removing these weeds. Here are some tips to recognize potential problems and keep Cheatgrass and Foxtails away from your pets:

- Keep weeds out of your pet's yard and enclosure
- Keep your pet's coat clean and well-groomed. This will help reduce grass seed accumulation and make for easier daily inspections
- Keep pets out of dry grassy fields and roadsides
- Inspect your pet daily for hair mats (where Cheatgrass likes to hide) and between toes
- Clipping the hair between paw pads in dogs will reduce potential for picking up Cheatgrass
- Any time your pet is excessively sneezing, drooling, shaking their head, scratching ears, whining, licking at their paw or other body part excessively, please have them checked by your veterinarian as soon as possible to prevent further damage

Animals with an infected grass awn penetration will show signs typical of an infection: lethargy, anorexia, painful, or signs of drainage. Finding and removing a Cheatgrass before it can embed and infect will save a lot of trouble. These grass seeds will not simply fall out the way they came in the vast majority of cases. This problem tends to continue to worsen over time. For assistance in getting rid of these noxious weeds, please contact your local extension agent for more information about local weed control in your area.