

Foxtail Barley

Hordeum jubatum L.

Alternate Names

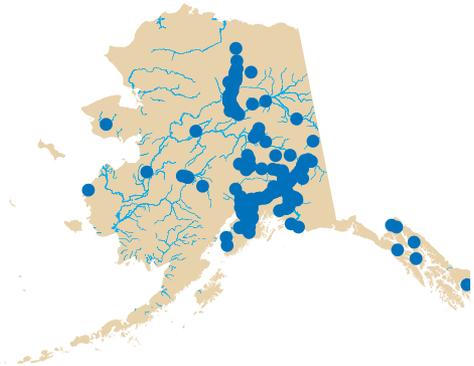
squirreltail barley

Description

This annual or biennial grass has pale green to reddish spikes on the inflorescence with numerous bristle-like awns. Culms are erect or decumbent at the base. Leaf blades are usually flat, $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch wide, and glabrous. Sheaths are glabrous, and ligules often appear decayed and terminate abruptly at less than $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch long. The inflorescence is a terminal spike, erect to nodding, 1–4 inches long, and bristly due to the long, slender, spreading awns of glumes and lemmas. Awns are 1–2½ inches long.

Similar Species

Two other *Hordeum* species occur in Alaska. Common barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.) sometimes escapes cultivation and can be distinguished by its broad, blunt glumes lacking awns. A native grass, meadow barley (*Hordeum brachyantherum* Nevski), looks similar to foxtail barley, but its awns are shorter, about $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch long. Foxtail barley may also be mistaken for quackgrass (*Elymus repens* (L.) Gould, included in this book) before the seedheads are present, but it lacks rhizomes.



XID Services photo by Richard Old



USDA Forest Service photo by Elizabeth Bella

Management

Foxtail barley is thought to be native to Alaska, but it is also considered a potentially invasive weed that readily colonizes areas of anthropogenic disturbance. Planting disturbed areas with desirable plants and controlling water levels is effective in reducing the amount of foxtail barley (Tesky 1992). It can also be controlled with herbicides (MAFRI 2001).

Notes

The barbed awns around foxtail barley seeds can work their way into the gums and digestive tracts of animals when eaten, causing irritation and inflammation. This geographically widespread grass could be indicative of Hudson Bay store activity in an area in the past or Northern Store activity in the present, as freighter canoes built in Quebec near Montreal were packed with straw for shipping and foxtail barley seeds were often present in that straw.



USDA Forest Service photo by Michael Shephard



National Park Service photo by Jeff Heys