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W136 Yellow Nutsedge

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Yellow nutsedge

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Yellow nutsedge *Cyperus esculentus* L.

Also known as: chufa, yellow nutgrass, chufa flatsedge

Classification and Description

Yellow nutsedge is a member of the Cyperaceae or sedge family. It is native to the eastern Mediterranean and is an erect, persistent perennial weed that may grow to heights of 2.5 feet. More commonly, plants are 6 to 12 inches in height. Seedlings rarely occur, as nutsedge spreads most commonly by rhizomes and tubers. The leaf blades are waxy, green, hairless and have a prominent midvein. Leaves also have no auricles or ligules and they gradually taper to a sharp point. The leaves are crowded, mostly basal and three-ranked, which means they are produced in sets of three from the base of the plant. Stems are solid and triangular in cross section, individual and not branching. The roots are fibrous and branched from tubers, rhizomes or basal bulbs. Stems produce yellow to yellowish-brown spikelets. Spikelets extend from a solitary point (umbel-like). Seed production and viability are variable.



Nutsedge



Nutsedge tubers

Interesting Facts

The name *esculentus* comes from Latin and means “edible.” It refers to the tubers of yellow nutsedge, which have a somewhat sweet taste. It was cultivated in ancient Egypt for its tasty and oil-rich tubers. The Native American Pima tribe chewed nutsedge roots as a cold remedy. The Piute tribe ground up the tubers and mixed with other foods. In Tennessee, tubers are consumed by ducks, deer and wild turkeys. Waterfowl, muskrats and rodents will feed on nutsedge sprouts.

Weed Status and Injury

Yellow nutsedge has spread as a weed to all the continents of the world and has adapted to climates from tropical to sub-arctic. Its adaptation to many agricultural habitats and great reproductive capacity has ranked it as the 16th worst weed in the world. It is a weed seen in 21 crops in more than 30 countries around the world. In Tennessee, yellow nutsedge can be a weedy pest in cotton, corn, soybean and grain sorghum production. It is also commonly found in horticultural crops, nurseries and turfgrass. It frequently occurs along lakes and rivers and in low-lying areas.

Management Considerations

Yellow nutsedge is particularly hard to control, as it emerges primarily from tubers throughout the growing season. Tillage only serves to temporarily disrupt it and distribute tubers. The sharply tipped leaves have emerged through black plastic mulch. Very few herbicides control this weed. Glyphosate, which is widely used in most row crops, will provide only marginal control. Please refer to the *Weed Control Manual for Tennessee Row Crops* (Extension PB 1580) for specific herbicides and management recommendations within various crops.



Nutsedge flowering structure

References

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