

Weed focus: Lambsquarters

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This warm season annual is common in disturbed areas, such as where hay feeding has taken place. Lambsquarters (*Chenopodium album* L.) is a member of the amaranth family and can tolerate both acidic and alkaline soils. It prefers open areas. It is native to Europe and Asia and is edible. Leaves are said to resemble spinach in taste; are rich in vitamins A and C, calcium, iron, and protein; and may be eaten raw or cooked. Seeds can be ground into flour or added to soups or breads.

While this plant is generally not toxic and can safely be eaten by livestock, it can contain oxalates. It can grow to 6 feet in height or more and form dense “forests” that out-compete more desirable species (see photo, next page). Young leaves are covered by a white powder. As the plant matures, the stem and leaves may turn reddish in color.



Photos: Lambsquarters plant at various stages of growth.





Lambsquarters can form dense, tall “forests”. These can be grazed by cattle or other livestock, which will strip off most of the tender plant material, leaving coarse stems. In the photo to the left, cattle (rear of pasture) are ready to be moved to a new area of Lambsquarters (front of pasture, at left in the photo). Notice the stems remaining after grazing (right side of photo).



Lambsquarters flowers are tiny and stemless. They appear in dense clusters at the tips of the main stems and branches (photo at left). The flowers lack petals and are coated in white powder. They produce copious amounts of seeds.

Controlling lambsquarters in pastures: Even though the only way lambsquarters propagates is by seed, it can be difficult to control because a single plant may produce 72,000 seeds, each of which can potentially survive for several years in the soil. Preventing the plants from flowering and setting seed is an effective way of gaining control and reducing populations over time. This can be accomplished by grazing or mowing when the plants are relatively small and are in the early vegetative stages. Having a strong forage base will also reduce lambsquarters.

Very large stands of this plant may require the application of herbicides. It is best to apply them when the plants are actively growing and before they begin to flower. Young weeds respond better to herbicides than old ones. Aminopyralid; 2, 4-D; dicamba, and triclopyr or combinations thereof may be applied. Be sure to follow label recommendations and remember that any herbicide application could be harmful to desirable plants. In cases of extreme infestation, pasture renovation may be necessary, beginning with an application of glyphosate.

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