Weed focus: Mare's tail (horseweed)

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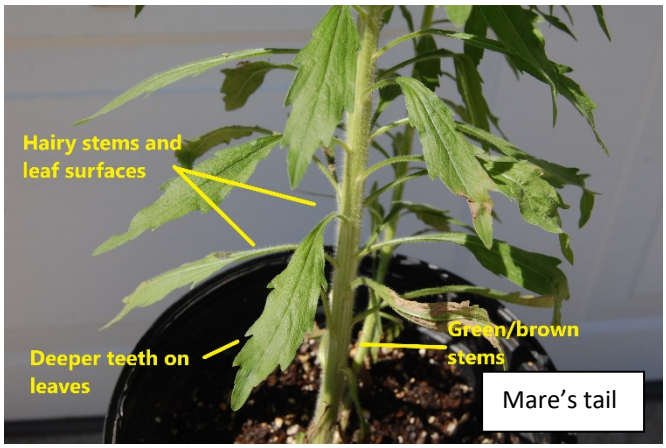
Mare's tail or horseweed (*Erigeron canadensis* L.) thrives in dry soil. It is a warm-season annual native to North America, a member of the aster family, and will crop up wherever the soil has been disturbed and left bare. There are reports of resistance to herbicides by this native, especially to glyphosate, so its presence in the landscape is increasing.

Mare's tail gets its name from its growth habit. Left undisturbed, it has a single stalk with many leaves, like a horse's tail with many hairs (photo at right). Mowing or grazing off of this plant can, however, result in branching, just below the cut point. It can grow to 6 feet in height or more.

Mare's tail closely resembles golden rod, especially when young. The two can be differentiated by several factors, including the teeth on their leaves, stem coloration, and hairiness (see photos, below).



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As the plants, mature, they become more distinguishable. The flowers of mare's tail are tiny and white (photo at right). Each plant is capable of producing 50,000 to 200,000 seeds which are borne on the wind by tiny parasols and favor extensive dispersal within and across fields.

Mare's tail has no know toxicity. Grazing cattle have been observed selecting to eat the tender, vegetative tops of this plant before moving on to other forages. Tea made from its leaves has been reportedly used by Native Americans to treat sore throat and dysentery. The leaves can also be mixed with pet bedding to help control fleas.

Controlling mare's tail in pastures: Mare's tail can be problematic in cropping fields because of its resistance to glyphosate. Infestations have reportedly reduced crop yields by 60% or more. In pastures, however, if only a few plants are present, this plant can safely be left alone. Livestock will learn to eat it. Preventing the plant from going to seed will help keep it under control and this can be accomplished by either grazing or mowing. Keeping bare ground to minimum will help prevent this plant from become established. Should a large stand develop, 2, 4-D and/or dicamba can be used to gain control. Aminopyralid, triclopyr with fluroxypr, chlorsulfuron, and picloram with 2, 4-D can also be applied. Choosing chemicals with different modes of action for tank mixtures may increase effectiveness; however, be sure to follow all label instructions. As with many weeds, it is best to apply the herbicides to small plants (< 5 inches tall) that are actively growing.