

A Northern Nevada Homeowner's Guide to Identifying and Managing Blue Mustard

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Other common names: Purple mustard, tenella mustard, bead-podded mustard, musk mustard

Scientific name: *Chorispora tenella*

Family: Brassicaceae

Description: A leafy, branching plant growing up to 1 1/2 feet tall, blue mustard sprouts in the fall, growing a ground-hugging rosette form. It matures early in the spring, often before homeowners are aware it is present. Blue mustard is characterized by a strong, unpleasant odor. It is commonly found growing in groups rather than as single plants.

Leaves: Alternately attached leaves are somewhat spear-shaped to oval, somewhat toothed, and are covered with tiny, sticky hairs.

Stems: Branch mostly from the base; sticky to the touch.

Flowers: Small, purplish flowers are about 1/2-inch across, with four petals in a cross shape. Blooms during the early spring. Seeds are produced in long narrow pods.

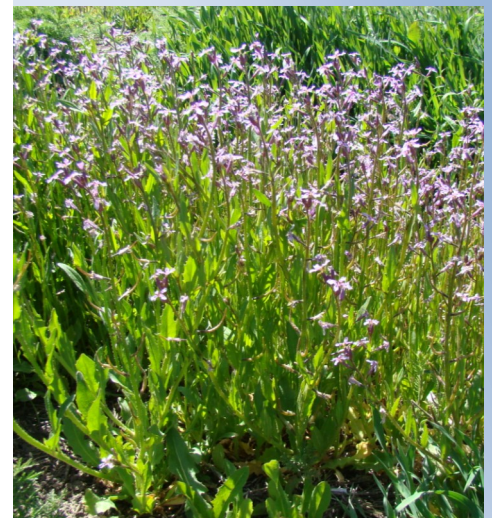
Roots: Grows a shallow taproot.

Native to: Europe

Where it grows: Roadsides, vacant lots and dry, disturbed sites

Life cycle: Winter annual (sprouts in fall and flowers in spring)

Reproduction: Reproduces by seed; seed can be produced within 10 days of flowering.



Typical plants growing in a disturbed site.



The rosette leaves are somewhat lobed.

(Top photo by W. Hanson Mazet,
bottom photo by J. DiTomaso, UC Davis)

Control methods: As with all annuals, preventing seed production is essential. Control before seeds are produced in the early spring.

Mechanical: Cultivation is very effective in controlling this plant. Dig, hoe or pull young plants. Mowing during early flowering reduces seed production.

Cultural: Plant desirable vegetation to help suppress it. Thick mulches may be effective in reducing infestations.

Biological: None commercially available.

Chemical: Try broadleaf selective herbicides such as 2,4-D + dicamba on rosettes early in the spring. Dicamba can persist for several months and may damage desirable plants in the area treated. Glyphosate can also be used on rosette leaves but is nonselective and damages both grasses and broadleaf plants. Add a surfactant per label instructions to enhance uptake by the waxy leaves. Pre-emergence herbicides will help to manage existing seed banks.

References:

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The purplish flowers occur in clusters at the ends of stems.

(Photo by W. Hanson Mazet)



The leaves are somewhat spear-shaped and have wavy, toothed margins.

(Photo by W. Hanson Mazet)