



A Northern Nevada Homeowner's Guide to Identifying and Managing Kochia

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Other common names: Mexican burningbush, Mexican fireweed, fireweed, mock cypress, summer cypress, etc. Kochia should not be confused with forage kochia (*Kochia prostrata*), a perennial shrub often planted during revegetation projects.

Scientific name: *Bassia scoparia*

Family: Chenopodiaceae

Description: When mature, kochia grows into a Christmas tree-shaped plant 1 to 6 feet tall. The seedlings have a very different appearance, with soft, silvery leaves. This plant does not have stickers or spines. Dead plants will break off and tumble.

Leaves: Narrow with smooth edges, ½ to 2 inches long. The blades have 3 or 5 prominent veins. The edges of the leaves are hairy. The upper surface is usually smooth, and the lower surface is usually covered with soft hairs.

Stems: Branch from the base, slender, often softly hairy but sometimes smooth. Stems are often striped with red.

Flowers: Tiny green flowers are arranged in spikes. The flowers do not have petals and are difficult to see. Blooms from late summer to fall.

Roots: Grows a deep taproot.

Native to: Europe; naturalized throughout the United States

Where it grows: Roadsides, vacant lots, in pavement cracks and other disturbed or unmanaged sites. Kochia tolerates poor, salty soils and drought conditions.

Life cycle: Annual (sprouts, flowers and dies in a single year)

Reproduction: Reproduces by seed



Typical plant growing in disturbed site.



Seedlings are silvery-green with soft leaves.

Control methods: Control relies on preventing production of seed. Seedlings are easily removed by mechanical means, while mature plants are difficult to remove due to the deep taproot.

Mechanical: Dig, hoe or pull young seedlings. Plants that are mowed will regrow. Mature plants are difficult to pull.

Cultural: Thick mulches can help prevent seed germination. Plant desirable vegetation that will shade the area and reduce germination and growth of young plants.

Biological: Can be grazed when young, but contains substances toxic to livestock, so grazing must be carefully managed.

Chemical: Apply broadleaf-selective herbicides on young plants. Mature plants are difficult to kill with herbicides. Pre-emergence herbicides can be used to manage existing seed banks.

References:

- Casey, P.A. 2009. Plant guide for kochia (*Kochia scoparia*). USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Kansas Plant Materials Center, Manhattan, Kansas, http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/publications/newpublications/pg_kosc.pdf.
- DiTomaso, J.M. and E.A. Healy. 2007. Weeds of California and Other Western States. University of California Publication 3488.
- UC IPM. No date. Kochia, <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/WEEDS/kochia.html>.
- Whitson, Tom D. (editor). 2002. Weeds of the West. University of Wyoming, Jackson, Wyoming.



Leaves have 3 to 5 prominent veins, and the flowers are barely noticeable.



The stem is often striped with a reddish color.



Dead plants break off and tumble, spreading seeds.

(All photos by S. Donaldson)

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