Annual poa

Why is it a weed?
Invasive species that colonises pastures and out-competes desirable grazing species

Where is it found?
All over NZ

Is it toxic?
No

Other uses
None

Photo: Sten Porse Wikimedia Commons

Photo: Harry Rose Wikimedia Common

I SPEND a lot of my time walking through pasture on large commercial farms, and on my block. The most common weed I see, by far, is annual poa (*Poa annua*).

It's so common, most farmers know what it is and how damaging it can be. But it's difficult to control, so they often overlook it.

The problem is poa's invasive growth habit. Most annual plants go to seed in spring and early summer, then die or go dormant during late autumn and winter. Annual poa often has seed heads during the winter months and is always the first grass species to go to seed in early spring.

Its seed bank can be colossal. It's estimated that in some turf there can be up to 200,000 seeds per square metre, or 20 seeds per square centimetre.

Worse, the time between setting seed and germination is only 5-6 weeks, giving it an amazing ability to colonise damaged pastures quickly.

Annual poa is often a lighter shade of green compared to most other grasses.

In dry conditions, it's usually the first to go brown and die off, leaving bare patches which can be unsightly in turf and lawns. Annual poa is a much smaller plant than the other poa species and often grows in clumps.

Annual poa has two distinguishable features:

- edges of the leaves come together at the tip, in a V-shape like the end of a boat;
- a pair of 'tramlines' run along the centre margin of the leaf.

How to control it

It's nearly impossible to get rid of annual poa that's growing amongst pasture. There are very few selective chemical options, and none (that I know of) are safe to use on clover.

Poa thrives in acidic conditions. You can suppress its spread by:

- draining wet areas;
- adding nitrogen fertiliser;
- improving soil pH.

These also help more desirable species to grow, outcompeting the poa.

Don't allow stock to pug soil; this restricts the growth of pasture and allows poa to take hold. ■

NOTE: We recommend you get your own independent advice before you take any action on your block. Any action you take is strictly at your own risk.

About Gary

Gary Bosley works as PGG Wrightson's North Island technical specialist in agronomy. He and his family live on a 4ha lifestyle block south of Auckland.