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## EC162 Pennycress and Peppergrass : Enemies of the Dairyman

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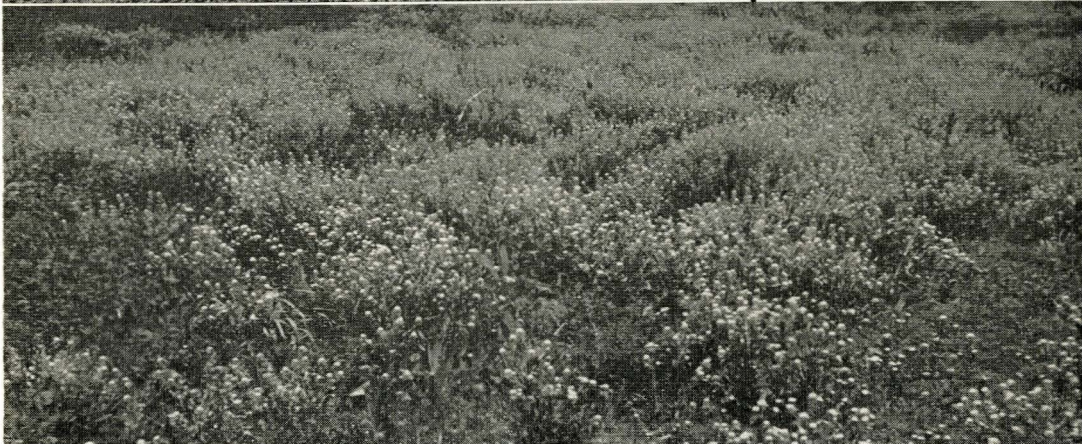
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Department of Entomology  
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# Pennycress and Peppergrass

## *Enemies of the Dairyman*



Cows on overgrazed, weedy pasture. Pennycress in a flooded out part of an alfalfa field.

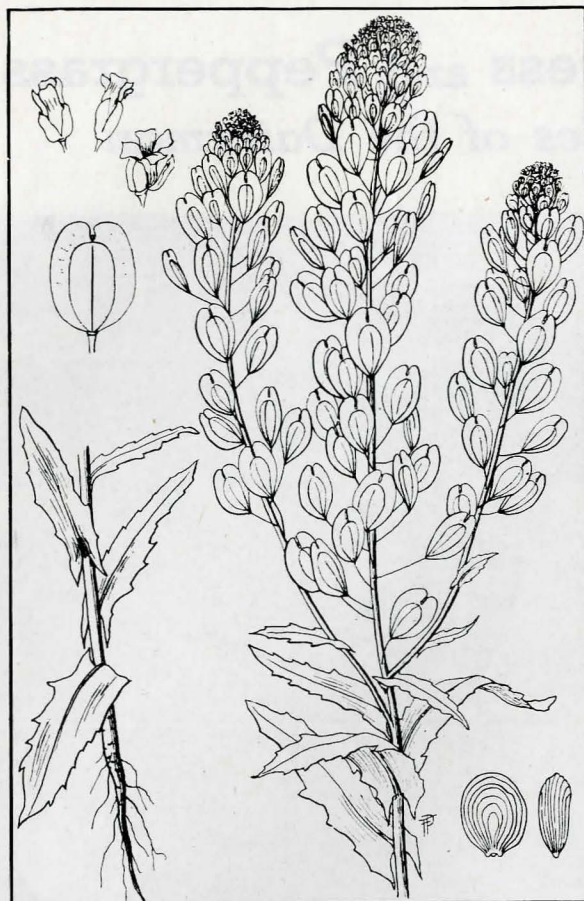
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, College of Agriculture  
Lincoln. Ext. Cir. 162





PENNYCRESS  
(*Thlaspe arvense*)

### Pennycress

Pennycress which is also called Frenchweed, fanweed, or stinkweed, is both an annual and winter annual. Rosettes usually appear in the fall and live over winter, starting growth early in the spring. The plants grow one to three feet high, are slightly branched at the top and have alternate leaves most of which are on the lower part of the plant. This weed gets started in sparsely vegetated areas in overgrazed pastures where it grows in thick patches crowding out other vegetation. Reproduction is only by seed, but a large number of seeds are borne on each plant. Flowers with five, small, white petals appear during May and June. The brown, ridged seeds are borne in flattened, broadly-winged pods that are notched at the top. The infested patches may be easily seen after maturity since the mature yellow color contrasts strongly with the surrounding green vegetation.

## Pennycress and Peppergrass

### Enemies of the Dairyman

#### Effect on Dairy Products

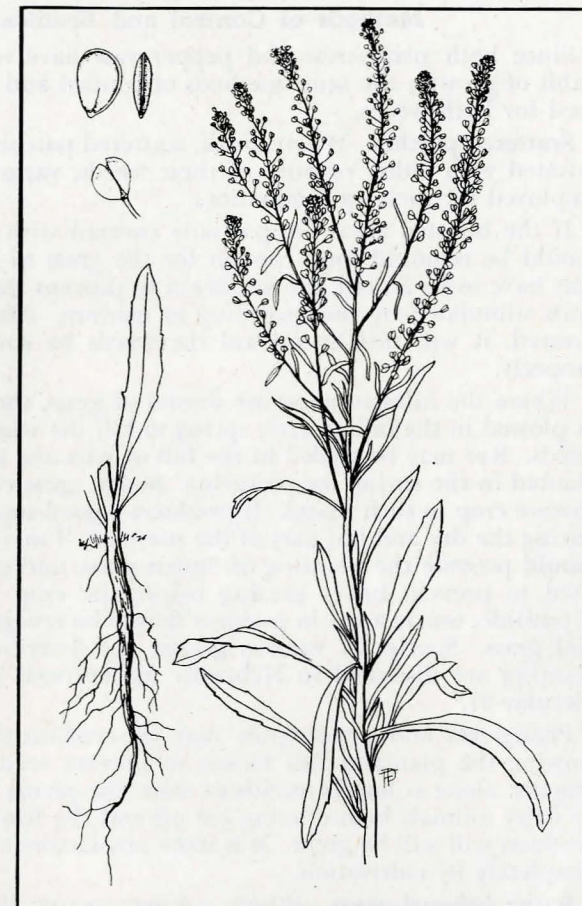
Weeds, particularly pennycress and peppergrass, cost the dairy industry in Nebraska thousands of dollars each year. These weeds, when eaten by milk cows, may impart a disagreeable odor and flavor to milk that persists throughout all the processes of dairy production. There is no way of removing this objectionable taint. Even if butter is stored at extremely low temperatures over a long period, the weedy flavor persists.

Pennycress causes the most trouble after the seeds mature. A small amount of seed consumed by the cow will impart a garlic-like flavor to milk and butterfat that cannot be removed. Only a small amount of tainted cream may spoil a whole churning of butter.

Peppergrass is most troublesome early in the spring when cows eat the green plant. It imparts a disagreeable, sweetish taste which becomes more noticeable with age of cream and butter.

Weed control is a necessary and important part of a good pasture program. Cows graze on weeds from necessity, not by choice. Good grass is more palatable. It is always sound economy and good management to keep pasture weeds under control.

Removal of cows from the pasture about four hours before milking time helps to reduce the weedy flavor. This practice may lower milk production of the herd unless some feed is provided in the dry lot.



PEPPERGRASS  
(*Lepidium apetalum*)

### Peppergrass

Peppergrass is also known as green-flowered peppergrass, wild tonguegrass, large peppergrass, and bird's pepper. It grows as either an annual or a winter annual and reproduces by seeds only. The plants grow from six inches to two feet tall, are much branched at the top, and are usually scattered rather than growing in patches. Plants of peppergrass appear from June to September. The flowers are small and the white petals drop off soon after the blossoms open. The seed pods are flattened on one side and are slightly winged with a notch at the top. The pods are shaped much like the pods of pennycress, but are many times smaller.



## Methods of Control and Eradication

Since both pennycress and peppergrass have essentially the same habit of growth, the same methods of control and eradication may be used for both weeds.

**Scattered patches.** Where small, scattered patches in the pasture are infested with either or both of these weeds, various methods may be employed for their extermination.

If the infested areas are partially covered with grass, the livestock should be removed long enough for the grass to recover. The areas may have to be fenced, the weeds cut to prevent their seeding, and the grass stimulated by the spreading of manure. After the grass has recovered, it will usually control the weeds by competition if grazed properly.

Where the infested areas are devoid of grass, they can be cultivated or plowed in the fall or early spring to kill the winter rosettes of these weeds. Rye may be seeded in the fall or oats and sweet clover may be planted in the spring for pasturing. Sudan grass can also be used as a pasture crop in such places. It produces a good supplementary pasture during the dry and hot part of the summer. Two or three cultivations should precede the planting of Sudan grass, and care should be exercised to prevent heavy grazing before the crop is well established. If possible, weedy areas in pastures should be revegetated with a perennial grass. Species of various grasses are described and methods of planting are discussed in Nebraska Agricultural Experiment Station Circular 67.

Pennycress and peppergrass may be eradicated from pastures by mowing the plants at full bloom to prevent seeding. However, this practice alone is hardly sufficient since the plants may still be grazed by dairy animals before being cut off and the loss from tainted dairy products will still be great. It is more satisfactory to destroy the plants completely by cultivation.

**Large infested areas.** Where a large area or the entire pasture is infested with pennycress or peppergrass, it is most desirable to revegetate the area with grass. This can be done by limiting the amount of grazing, spreading manure on thinly grassed areas, and cutting the weeds frequently to reduce competition for the desired species. Cultivation of the entire infested area and reseeding to a suitable grass species may be the best solution. Temporary pasture may need to be provided during this period. Further information regarding pasture improvement for the particular region may be obtained from the county agricultural agent or from the Agricultural Extension Service at the College of Agriculture, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Prepared by N. S. Hanson and M. N. Lawritson.