

Spear grass FAQs

What is spear grass?

The term “spear grass” is a common name applied to a variety of grasses. In Saanich, we know of two invasive species: *Bromus rigidus* (rip-gut brome) and *Bromus sterilis* (barren brome), but there is the potential for more. There are also native wild barley or Foxtail grasses (*Hordeum species*) that are often called spear grass.

Many types of grass could fit into this general category. These grasses share similar characteristics, particularly the long awns. An awn is a long, stiff, sometimes-barbed, projection at the top end of the grass seed. The part of the grass seed that accomplishes the initial hook can either be the awn or the "callus", a hard projection at the base of the grass floret that attaches the grass seed to the stem. The long, narrow grass seeds are dispersed by snagging on a moving object. This may sound harmless enough, except that if snagged on an animal and not detected, the seed moves along the hair toward the skin and the callus can cause a lesion and work its way into the soft tissue. Once there, the grass can cause infection in the animal and may have to be removed surgically.

What can pet owners do to prevent problems with spear grass?

Prevention is key. In the late summer when grass seeds "head up" or appear ripe, it is wise to refrain from walking your pet in long grass. Stick to the trails and walk with your pet on a leash. A good rule of thumb is, if you have grass seed in your socks after a walk your dog likely has seed on/in its coat. Check your pet's paws, coat, and eyes regularly from July to October after walks and look for signs of lesions or infection. If you do notice a swelling or cyst-like lump on your pet's body, it is recommended that you consult a veterinarian as soon as possible.

What is Saanich Parks doing about spear grass?

To date, our interest in spear grass has been to control invasive Bromus in our Garry Oak restoration sites in parks. Crews in the Natural Areas section maintain the designated trails throughout our Natural Area Parks and beach access trails; other sections have regular mowing and trimming schedules to maintain playgrounds and open field parks. Spear grass is not specifically targeted as an invasive species outside of these regularly maintained areas, however, if there are portions of any trail that the crews may have missed during the vegetation pruning, please call the Parks office (250-475-5522) and they can assess the situation.