

The rolling balls of life

‘Wild Wild West’ - hearing these words we immediately link ourselves with the Western arid North America with its rugged terrain, dry environment, rolling weeds and cowboys in hats and tights. Thanks to Hollywood for this globally acknowledged collage. One of the obvious components of this picture is rolling weeds aka Tumbleweeds. The Tumbleweeds are bushy plants/plant bodies which after finishing their reproductive function becomes dry and gradually detach themselves from their place of association. The detached bush often appears as dry and thorny ball of various sizes then tumbles by the wind and rolls over a great distance along the deserted landscape. The underlying reason for this curious activity is the dispersal of seeds so that they can spread across a vast area and can avoid harsh competition for resources. Moreover, this frantic movement helps these plants to establish their colony throughout Western North America and forces people to take them as a serious menace to public life.



Pretty tumbleweed *Brunsvigiabosmaniae*



Tumbleweeds at the doorstep

This tumbling activity has been reported from a number of flowering plants and even from the lower group of plants like fungi and pteridophytes. Some well-known members are, *Salsola kali* subsp. *tragus* (Russian thistle), *Artiplex rosea* (tumbling oracle), *Centaurea diffusa* (tumble knapweed), *Gypsophila paniculata* (baby’s breath), *Selaginella lepidophylla* (pteridophytes) and members of earthstar mushroom family (Geastraceae).

Tumbleweed has a significant presence in American socio-cultural life especially in the western part of the continent. Be it music, literature, painting or movie, the Western arid landscape has been vividly portrayed with these moving plant forms.

Source : Wikipedia

Photo: Getty images, New York Post

Collector: **Rajasri Ray**