

Pasture and Rangeland Weed Control Part 2

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Prescribed Burning: Prescribed burning is a valuable tool for managing weed and grass populations in the tallgrass prairie. The response of forbs to fire depends upon the timing of the burn. Prescribed burning in late spring is the best time to control most forbs. Burning in early spring increases perennial forbs but generally reduces warm season grass production. Prairie threawn is unique because it must be burned in November to be controlled.

Mechanical Control can be effective but is labor intensive and expensive. Consequently, mechanical control measures are only feasible for small or scattered patches. Often, grubbing initial invading weeds can prevent severe infestations. If taprooted weeds such as musk thistle are dug, the root must be cut several inches below ground to prevent regrowth. Mowing weed-infested areas temporarily removes top growth but often stimulates vigorous regrowth. Because desirable forage is also clipped, mowing should be limited to dense weed stands. Undesirable annual grasses should be mowed after the seed stalk has elongated but before seeds mature. Annual forbs can be controlled by cutting below the lowest leaf early in the growing season. Mowing may be aesthetically satisfying, but it seldom eliminates annual weeds because viable seed in the soil and dispersal from surrounding areas continually invade. Mowing generally is not effective in controlling perennial forbs, although repeated mowings will reduce their vigor and limit their spread.

Herbicides: Applications of herbicides have reduced forb populations on many grasslands. Removing all forbs from rangeland with indiscriminate spraying, however, is not desirable. Elimination or large scale reduction of beneficial forbs will reduce animal gains, disturb wildlife habitat, and produce a plant community that has a shortened season of high quality forage. Herbicides are most effective on annual weeds that are in the seedling stage or less than 8 inches tall. Biennial species require two years to complete their life cycle and are easiest to control in the rosette stage. Perennial weeds are most susceptible to herbicides during the bud to early-bloom stage. Optimum weed control is obtained if conditions that are favorable for plant growth follow the herbicide application. Careful and selective use of herbicides, combined with proper management, can hasten recovery of weed-infested areas. Apply only herbicides labeled for the target weed species and registered for rangeland use. **Follow label instructions carefully and use herbicides with caution.** Refer to the 2015 Chemical Weed Control book for the latest chemical recommendations. It can be located at the KSU Extension web site or you can pick one up at our office. Another good resource is the Brush and Weed control information that you can find at our Butler County Extension site, or in the office.

Summary: Weed management is an important factor in properly managing rangeland. Determining whether or not a “weed” is detrimental is the first step of a control program. Weed infestations are often the symptom of underlying problems, and unless the problem is corrected, weeds will recur. The key to weed management is recognizing potential problems and controlling them before they become serious.