

THE GRAPEVINE

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CONTROLLING LAWN WEEDS

Those beautiful purple flowers that inundate our farm fields and lawns in the spring are one of the biggest detriments to lawns getting a good start at the beginning of the growing season. This henbit, along with chickweed and dandelions are the big three we have to contend with every spring. What makes controlling them a little tricky is the timing - if you wait until you see the flowers in the spring you are too late for good control. These lawn weeds need to be sprayed in the fall. The best time to do this is after our first hard freeze of the fall. Our average date of our first hard freeze is October 20th, but in my 27 years here I have seen it come as early as September 22nd and as late as December 1st. Not having a hard date on the calendar is probably the biggest bug-a-boo about good home lawn weed control. We had a freeze on October 16, this year, but it wasn't hard enough to send everything into dormancy. When we get a freeze hard enough to put our desirable landscape plants into dormancy it is time to look for a nice, warm day after that to apply a spray that will control most of the weed we are used to seeing in the spring. Spraying at this time will eliminate 99% of these weeds and leave you with nothing more than a little bit of spot spraying or manual weeding come springtime. Now for what spray - usually 2,4-D is all that is needed to spray on our lawns to control these broadleaf weeds. Most 2,4-D formulas on the market are in a combination with at least one other herbicide. MCPP and Dicamba are the other herbicides that are usually found in combination with 2,4-D. These combination sprays are even more effective than 2,4-D alone. These are the mixtures that are found in many products such as Weed-B-Gon and Trimec, to name a couple. Another combination product on the market is Weed Free Zone, this product contains a herbicide that provides better control of clover than the products listed above. So if you have a clover issue you should look for 'Weed Free Zone'.

One caveat is the form that you find 2,4-D in. 2,4-D comes in two formulations, one is a salt, the other is an ester. The ester formulation is volatile at 72 F. The salt formulation is volatile at 85 F. So if you spray the ester formulation on a day that the high temp exceeds 72, the it will turn into a vapor and can envelope plants that you don't want to harm. The salt formulation is safer for home lawn applications since it doesn't volatilize until 85, and this is what is found in Nurseries and Garden Centers. The ester formulation is used by farmers and ranchers for better weed control during cold months and usually is bought at a Co-op or farm supply store. But if you spray after that first hard freeze then there is less chance of damage occurring to your landscape plants with either one of these (except for evergreens) because they are dormant. So just watch the temps regardless of what you use. Again - wait until we have a hard freeze to spray - or if you can't wait be sure that the wind is not excessive and the temp range is right. And as always, if you have any questions about any of this just call the Butler County Extension office at (316) 321-9660.

Tucking Your Lawnmower in for the Winter

If you are done mowing for the year, be sure to service your mower before putting it away. Make sure you drain the gas tank of gasoline-powered engines or use a gasoline stabilizer. Untreated gasoline can become thick and gummy. A few drops of oil squirted inside the spark plug hole (after you remove the spark plug) will help lubricate the cylinder. While you have the spark plug removed, replace it with a new one. If your equipment has a battery, clean the battery terminals, which usually corrode during the season. A wire-bristle brush is a good tool for doing this. The battery can then be removed or connected to a battery maintainer that will keep it charged over winter. If you remove the battery, be sure to store it in a protected location for the winter (a cool

basement works best). Now is also an excellent time to sharpen mower blades so they'll be ready next spring. Following these tips can help you better prepare your mower for winter storage and also save you some steps this coming spring.

Hardiness of Cool-Season Vegetables

Cool-season vegetables vary in cold tolerance, with some able to take colder temperatures than others. Semi-hardy crops can take a light frost but are damaged by temperatures in the mid- to upper-20s. Examples include beets, Chinese cabbage, collards, Irish potatoes, Bibb lettuce, mustard, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard, and leaf lettuce. Covering these plants when cold weather threatens can help extend the harvest season. Plants termed "hardy" can take lower temperatures but are damaged when the temperature drops to the low 20s. These include cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, carrots, turnips, and kale. Certain root crops can essentially be stored outside even after the leaves have been damaged or killed by frost. Beets, carrots, potatoes and turnips can be mulched and harvested as needed until the soil starts to freeze in late November to December. Growing vegetables in Kansas can be a challenge, but we have an extremely long gardening season. We can harvest from early April (asparagus) to early December. Winter is a good time to plan and prepare for next year's crops.

Keeping Your Pumpkin Longer

If you buy your pumpkins early, there are some tricks to make them last. Make sure the pumpkin wasn't harvested too early; before the rind developed a hard, waxy layer to keep it from drying out and shriveling. Test the pumpkin with your thumbnail. If it penetrates the fruit easily, it was harvested too early. Pumpkins also keep better in cooler weather. Even mature pumpkins may benefit from a light application of a spray wax such as that used for cars. If you carve your pumpkins, consider that the seeds can be saved and roasted. Scoop out the seeds, rinse them well to remove any strands of tissue that have remained and spread them out so they can dry. Once dry, they can be roasted on a cookie sheet for 10 to 15 minutes at 350 degrees. Roast larger seeds for the longer amount of time. If you prefer salted seeds, soak the seeds in a brine. Make the brine by combining 2 tablespoons of salt for every 2 cups of water. Add the seeds to the brine and bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes. Drain, toss with a tablespoon of olive oil and spread on a cookie sheet. Bake at 400 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes. Check the seeds during the last 5 minutes and remove when done. Note that carving reduces the longevity of pumpkins with carved pumpkins doing well to last a week.

Winter Storage of Summer Bulbs

As winter approaches, we need to start thinking about storage of the bulbs that will not survive Kansas winters. The bulbs of gladiolus, caladium, dahlia, tuberous begonia, calla lily, and canna lily need to be dug and stored so they can be planted next year. Actually, the storage organ of the above plants is not a true bulb. Canna and calla lilies are rhizomes, caladium, and tuberous begonias are tubers, gladiolus is a corm, and dahlia is a tuberous rooted plant. All of these plants should be dug after frost has at least partially browned the foliage. Then, allow them to dry for about a week in a shady, well-ventilated site such as a garage or tool shed. Freezing temperatures should be avoided. Remove any excess soil and pack them in peat moss, vermiculite, or perlite. Make sure the bulbs don't touch so that if one decays, the rot doesn't spread. Dusting them with fungicide before storage will help prevent them from rotting. Caladium should be stored between 50 and 60 degrees F. The other bulbs mentioned should be stored as near 40 degrees F as possible. Finding a good spot to store the bulbs may be difficult. Some people place them against a basement wall farthest from the furnace and insulate them so the wall keeps them cool.

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