

Ag Column
Chris Ramsey
September 11, 2017

Plan Now to Control Winter Weeds

Labor Day weekend, this year, transitioned our weather to the crisp temperatures of fall. With the cooler temperatures, livestock and forage producers should start thinking about making spray applications to control winter weeds.

Winter weeds begin to germinate in late summer when nighttime temperatures drop below 60 F. The cool season weeds will continue to germinate through late fall. Some spraying can be done as soon as early November with ideal spraying opportunities often occurring through mid-December.

One of the most important considerations for controlling weeds in a pasture or hay field is timing. Weeds are categorized as perennials and annuals. Dr. Gary Bates, UT Extension Forage Specialist, says “While nuisances like buttercups are easily removed with herbicides, many producers don’t think about spraying weed killers until it is too late for spraying to be effective.”

Several livestock owners this year have reported having buckhorn plantain in their fields. This perennial weed has long narrow leaves with a small seed head at the top of a stalk that shoots up in the middle of the plant. Some winter annual weeds that repeatedly cause problems are deadnettle, henbit, chickweed, and buttercup.

For effective control in a pasture or hay field, weeds must be sprayed before they bloom. In November and December, these weeds have had adequate time to germinate and begin to grow. For the most effective control, herbicides should be applied after three or four days of 60 F to insure that the weeds are actively growing. Bates recommends to wait for new growth if weeds have been severely damaged by recent frosts.

Make sure you positively identify the weed before selecting an herbicide. Some weeds like plantain can be easily controlled with 2,4-D or Weedmaster, while others may require an herbicide such as Grazon Next which offers newer chemistry.

Before applying the herbicide, you should take the time to calibrate your sprayer. This can be easily accomplished in just a few minutes with the 1/128-acre method. More information is available at your local extension office. Make sure you get adequate coverage by spraying at least 20 gallons of water per acre.

Effective broadleaf weed control will mean killing all of your clovers, but there is a positive side. Clover seed persists in the seed bank for many years. With good spring rains, some clover seed will probably germinate. With the exception of Grazon Next, most herbicides applied in the fall will not prevent late winter germination of clover. For good weed control, identify your weed, select the right herbicide, and properly time your application.