

Weed Control Decisions Begin in Late Winter

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With relative mild temperatures and good soil moisture during the early winter months cool-season weeds have already begun to become more widespread this winter. The first step in determining weed management options in the early spring is to do a critical evaluation of pasture fields during the late winter months - early to mid February. Scout fields looking for any developing weed problems. Typically plants such as musk thistle are in the rosette growth stage and have begun to increase in diameter. Poison hemlock and buttercups which emerge from seed in the fall are becoming more active and can be found in their vegetative growth stage. Also other winter annual weeds such as purple deadnettle, common chickweed, and various mustard species can be found.

Cool-season weeds will typically be more prominent in grazed pastures and hayfields in areas that have bare soil and thin vegetative cover. For thistles and poison hemlock look near fence rows, field borders, and other field areas where these weed problems were observed during the past season. Buttercup is often found in pasture fields that have been heavily grazed during the late fall and winter months. When musk thistle, poison hemlock, or buttercup are in their early vegetative stages of growth they can be effectively controlled with herbicides containing 2,4-D. As long as daytime temperatures are near or above 60 F herbicide treatments can be applied during late February and March when these weeds resume their active growth.

As cool-season weeds die back in the early spring they will often be replaced with warm-season annual weeds such as common ragweed or cocklebur during the summer months. Thus, another important decision is whether to use herbicides to kill existing weeds or put into action other management practices such as interseeding clovers or more grass in the spring to thicken the stand of desirable forage species. You may not be able to do both practices in the spring since most broadleaf herbicides have the potential to injure newly emerging forage grasses and legumes. For herbicides containing only 2,4-D it is generally recommended to wait 6 to 8 weeks after spraying before reseeding forage crops. Other pasture herbicides may require a 4 to 6 month waiting period following application before seeding forage legumes or grasses (consult the label of specific herbicide products used). As a rule of thumb, if you decide to spray this spring you will need to wait until late summer or fall before seeding additional forages. If you reseed first, then it is recommended that you wait until the new grass seedlings have become well established before making a herbicide application. When applying a herbicide on pastures for broadleaf weed control one significant consideration is that clovers or other legumes that are present are likely to be killed.

Another course of action is a "wait and see" approach. But, keep in mind that smaller weeds are easier to control than older, mature plants. More specific details on weed management and herbicides labeled for use on grazed pastures and their effectiveness on target weed species can be obtained in the University of Kentucky Extension bulletin, *Weed Management in Grass Pastures, Hayfields, and Fencerows* (AGR-172) available at your local county extension office or <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/agr/agr172/agr172.pdf> .