

Inside Grundy County  
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### **All About Weeds!**

At a recent meeting I attended, the ice breaker question asked was, “What image does spring conjure up?” One individual responded, “green” and the very next response was weeds! The simple definition for a weed is an unwanted plant. And we go to great lengths to keep unwanted plants out of certain areas. This is a general review of common weeds and some “issues” regarding weed control in pastures, ponds, and lawns.

The most problematic weeds in pastures are thistles. There are numerous thistle species but the most common in our pastures are the perennial Canadian thistle or the biennial musk thistle. One Canadian thistle plants can send out roots 20 ft. horizontally and it only takes a 1/8 inch segment of the underground rhizome to regenerate a new plant. New plants can also start from seed and seeds remain viable for 3 years and some seeds may remain up to 20 years in the soil. Although the plant can be a feed source for birds such as goldfinches and sparrow, once a patch established, the thistle will out compete the desired pasture plants.

Musk thistle is a biennial plant and in the first year, produces a low lying rosette. They reproduce by seed with one plant being able to produce 10,000 seeds. Missouri research indicates that moderate infestations will reduce pasture yields by 23%. So control of thistles is warranted. Many of these weeds become a problem due to over grazing or poor pasture fertility. Proper stocking rates and good fertility will produce competitive pasture forages that make it harder for thistles to establish themselves.

Good cultural management and chemical control are considered the most economical management practices. Trials conducted at ISU and Minnesota in the early 90’s showed that Canadian thistle is harder to control with similar chemical products than musk thistle. There are numerous chemicals available that are effective in either or both spring and fall and costs per acre vary considerably. There are also differences in terms of grazing restrictions. For a list of those chemicals and comments on some fact sheets (Canada Thistle) & (Musk Thistle), go to the Butler County Extension web site and look for this article on our web site at:  
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/butler/>

In late summer, numerous pond owners stop by the office looking for information on controlling pond weeds. The first step to controlling pond weeds is proper identification. Pond plants are divided into four groups, algae, floating, emergent or submersed weeds. There are cultural, biological, mechanical and chemical methods to control weeds. Proper pond design along shallow areas and winter draw down of water can reduce some algae and submersed weeds. Biological controls include grass carp which are stocked at 4 to 5 fish per surface acre. Grass carp can control succulent weeds such as coontail and water milfoil but not cattail.

Chemical control methods first depend on accurate weed identification. Because product selection will depend on what plant species you wish to control. For example, copper compounds are effective on algae but not other plants. Most chemical controls are best applied in spring before water temperatures warm up and vegetative growth becomes excessive. For more information on this topic, go to the ISU Fisheries and Aquatic Extension web site at: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/fisheries/> and click on the pond management link then aquatic plant management.

The time to apply products for controlling crabgrass in lawns is quickly approaching. I discussed this in a recent column but in case you missed it, these products are best applied before soil temperatures begin reaching 60°F. Soil temperatures have been around 50°F. In most years, apply crabgrass pre emergent products around the middle of April in our area. As for broadleaf weed control, fall is the ideal time but weeds can still be controlled in spring. It's best to use a broad spectrum herbicide if you have more than one type of weeds. Spring control of ground ivy is more effective if applied when it's flowering. Research at Purdue showed herbicides containing 24-D and triclopyr was effective on ground ivy.