

Weed Control Tips For Your Fall Pastures

The fall can be an appropriate time to manage certain weeds with a systemic herbicide in hayfields and pastures that have been mowed or grazed. Biennials such as common burdock, bull and musk thistles are much easier to kill while they are in the rosette stage of growth and prior to surviving a winter. (The same is true of the dandelions in your lawn.) Once these weeds awake in the spring, they grow rapidly with the goal of reproducing and it becomes more difficult to control them. So the end of August (if not too hot) into Oct. can be favorable conditions for applying herbicides for weed control. Keep in mind that with both biennial and perennial plants require adequate leaf area to absorb the herbicide and be effective. Favorable air temperatures should also be a consideration immediately before, during, and after application. In general, the warmer the better, with daytime high temperatures in the mid 50's at a minimum. Cold nights and cool, cloudy days will reduce and slow the effectiveness of the applications too. The more active the weeds are growing, the better the herbicide works so don't wait too long.

Here are some strategies to keep in mind:

1. Look at your pastures and identify trouble spots. Determine if overstocking is contributing to the problem and consider adjusting your grazing management plan to match available forage. A lot of times we bring on the problem of weeds by our grazing management practices.
2. Identify the weeds and what will control them. Which herbicides you choose, and the recommended application rates, will vary by weed species and timing. For many weeds, a broad-spectrum herbicide with residual control will be the most cost-effective. If woody plants are also present, or they are the dominant species, consider products labeled for brush control like Chaparral, Crossbow, or some of the products listed in this article. Some products offer weed and brush control, or you can tank mix to reach the desired control. Once you've established what species you want to target, contact your applicator or ag chemical salesman for a specific product. If doing it yourself talk to your local county extension agent for help.
3. Spray the right rate at the right time. Annual weeds in pastures are generally most susceptible early in the season, when they're about 2" tall and actively growing, and when soil moisture is adequate. The lowest labeled rates will be effective then. Contact herbicides, such as 2,4-D, are effective only on emerged weeds and won't effectively control weeds that sprout after application. Treat weeds while they are actively growing, but before flowering and seed production. Remember you'll need to increase herbicide rates as the plant matures.
4. Instead of spraying consider mowing especially drought-stressed or mature weeds. Weeds without adequate moisture that aren't actively growing will be difficult to control with herbicides. Don't spray unless you're willing to accept less control. Mowing biennial and perennial plants will set them up for fall treatment when they generate regrowth.

5. Always follow label directions for application and mixing. When ground broadcasting, apply the recommended herbicide rate in 10-20 gallons of total spray mixture per acre. For brush control, use at least 20 gallons/acre to ensure thorough coverage. For either weeds or brush, use the recommended rate of an ag surfactant to thoroughly wet the foliage. And pay attention to drift and consider a drift-control additive to reduce it.
6. Use herbicides with good soil residual activity carefully. They should not be used on cropland or land to be rotated to crops. Herbicide-treated grasses may, for a time, carry a residue that can be transferred to the soil by hay, livestock manure or urine. Always read and observe all labels.

7. Herbicide Review

Here is a quick summary of common herbicide options:

- 2, 4-D ester 4E (1/2 to 1.5 pt/A) - 2, 4-D is a systemic herbicide that controls annual, biennial, and perennial broadleaves. The ester formulation is slightly more active than the amine and should not be used post-emergence if temperatures are greater than 80°F. 2, 4-D is commonly tank mixed with other herbicides (e.g., dicamba) to improve control and broaden weed spectrum. This is a good, inexpensive herbicide with limitations. It tends to be weak on a number of weed species so check the label. It has a 7 day grazing and 30 day haying restriction.
- Clarity 4S or Banvel 4S (0.5 to 4 pt/A) - Clarity/Banvel (dicamba) is a systemic herbicide that controls many annual and biennial broadleaf weeds and provides suppression or control of numerous perennials. Clarity/Banvel is commonly tank mixed with other herbicides (e.g., 2, 4-D) to improve control and broaden weed spectrum.
- Cimarron 60DF (0.1 to 1 oz/A) - Cimarron (metsulfuron-methyl) is an ALS - inhibitor herbicide that controls many annual, biennial, and some perennial broadleaf weeds, depending on the rate used. It can be used in established warm or cool season grass stands. For most grass species, do not apply until one year after establishment (minimum of 6 months); It is often tank mixed with 2, 4-D or dicamba to increase activity and weed control spectrum. Cimarron does not have any grazing or haying restrictions.
- Milestone 2L (3 to 7 fl oz/A) - Milestone (aminopyralid) is a newer active ingredient labeled for grass hay and pasture. Milestone controls many annual, biennial, and perennial broadleaf weeds and is effective on thistles (Canada, bull, musk, plumeless), burdock, dock species, bedstraw, horsenettle, knapweed, sowthistle, ironweed and others. Milestone can be tank-mixed with other herbicides and the addition of NIS is recommended to enhance activity. Milestone is non-volatile. ForeFront R&P 3L (1.5 to 2.6 pt/A) is a premix of aminopyralid plus 2,4-D that can also be used in grass hay and pasture to broaden the spectrum of activity. Milestone has no grazing or haying restrictions, while Forefront has a 7 day haying restriction. For both Milestone and ForeFront, special manure handling precautions are recommended to prevent injury to sensitive broadleaf plants (see label guidelines).