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AGRIVIEW

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Grass is generally regarded as the most desirable ground cover for the home landscape; however, there are situations where it may not be the most practical landscape covering. Following several years of drought this spring may hopefully offer an opportune time to regenerate lawns and landscape.

In steeply sloping or heavily shaded areas where grass does not grow well, other methods of covering the soil must frequently be selected. One of the most satisfactory methods is the use of ground cover plants.

These plants range from woody vines to dwarf shrubs, depending on individual needs.

Some of the more prominent uses of ground cover in typical situations are to cover bare areas of ground, prevent soil erosion, give variety to yard or garden, regulate foot traffic in the yard or garden when used as edging for pathways and to unify unrelated shrubs and flower beds in the landscape.

In addition, ground covers are frequently used under or around trees where grass grows poorly or where exposed tree roots make mowing a problem. Ground cover plants eliminate the need for mowing as well as concealing exposed tree roots.

Many possibilities for living ground covers are available. For shade or partial shade, consider vinca, English ivy, monkey grass, lirioppe and ajuga. Asiatic jasmine, monkey grass, creeping junipers, purple leaf honeysuckle, lirioppe, day lilies, dwarf yaupon and dwarf nandina are good for sunny locations.

Aggressive competitors for sunlight, moisture and nutrients and prolific multipliers even under adverse conditions, weeds present a challenge for even the most experienced turfgrass managers. The color, texture and growth rate of weeds often contrast markedly to those of the turfgrass they may be associated with in a lawn or sports field. Consequently, weeds detract from the uniformity of a turf and add to its maintenance requirements.

The origins of weeds are as varied as those of our turfgrasses. Most are introduced species from Asia and Europe that were inadvertently brought to this country. Many were unintentional stowaways in animal fodder or ship ballasts, or simply contaminants in seed or food supplies brought to this country.

In lawns and sports fields, weeds are often the result of poor quality turf, rather than the cause of poor turf. The aggressive nature of weeds and their prolific reproductive capacity enable them to invade thin, weak turf areas. Cultural practices should always be viewed as the first step to effective weed control. If the basic problem is not corrected, weeds will continue to occur. An effective weed control program also requires identification of the undesirable species as to its classification as a grassy weed, a broadleaf weed, an annual or a perennial. Most turf weeds belong to two principal categories - grasses and broadleaf plants. Chemical controls for those two categories of plants frequently differ.

Grassy weeds have jointed, hollow stems; leaf blades have veins parallel to leaf margins, and are several times longer than they are wide; roots are fibrous and multi-branching; and flowers are usually inconspicuous. In contrast, broadleaved plants often have showy flowers; leaves have a network of veins at diverse angles to one another; stems are often pithy; and a taproot is usually present. Another group of turf weeds, sedges, have grass like characteristics, but require a different group of chemicals for control. Sedges are characterized by three-sided stems (triangular cross-section) which bear leaves in three directions (in contrast to the two-ranked arrangement of grass leaves).

Weeds can be further grouped according to their life span - annual or perennial. From the standpoint of chemical control, the grouping is most important, because preemergent herbicides are only effective for control of annual weeds. Annual weeds germinate from seed each year, mature in one growing season, and die in less than 12 months. Crabgrass and henbit are examples of annual weeds - crabgrass being a summer annual and henbit being a winter annual. Preemergent herbicides must be applied according to the expected date of emergence for each targeted species.

Perennial weeds live more than one year, and recover or regrow from dormant stolons, rhizomes, or tubers as well as from seed. Control of perennial weeds requires a post emergent herbicide during its season of active growth.

Effective chemical weed control requires identification of the weeds as to their classification (grass, broadleaf, sedge, etc.) life span (annual or perennial) and season of active growth (cool season or warm season). Effective chemical control also requires accurate timing of applications, proper rate of application, and uniformity of application. Always follow label directions for a product and observe all warnings and precautions

relative to safety of the application. Herbicide labels should be carefully reviewed for additional details on specific users of each product.

IMPORTANT DATES:

March 25th - Private Property Rights Seminar - 6:00 p.m. - TVCC Auditorium - Athens - Free - Pre-register by calling the Extension Office on or before Friday, March 21st.

March 27th - Henderson County Master Gardener Spring Conference - 5:00 p.m. - Cain Center - \$20.00 - Tickets available from any Master Gardener or the Extension Office

April 3rd - Cattleman's Cow-Calf Clinic - 3:00 p.m. - Henderson County Regional Fair Park Complex - \$15.00 - 1.5 C. E. U.'s

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