**Importance of Weed ID, May 4-10**

Western ragweed, giant ragweed, marestail, wooly croton, dewberries, silverleaf nightshade, sand bur, crabgrass, smut grass, Johnson grass, broomsedge bluestem, yellow nutsedge, and various others. Many readers may think I am listing off plants that can be found throughout East Texas, but agriculture producers will quickly recognize this as a list of what we would consider weeds in hay fields and improved pastures. Agriculture producers have a keen eye when it comes to spotting unwanted weeds in their fields, but sometimes fall short in accurate weed ID. You may ask why is weed ID so important? Can I not just spray herbicide that is labeled for use in Bermuda or Bahia pasture? If you are following the label you most certainly can, but that does not mean you will achieve success in killing your weeds. To explore the reasons behind this we must first define what a weed is.

A weed is any unattractive, unwanted, or undesirable plant growing in a location where it is competing with desirable or cultivated plants. This broad definition allows a plant to be a weed in one location while being a desirable plant in another location. For example, dewberries can be desirable for wildlife if managing a woodland, but is a weed when growing in hayfields. Now that we have defined a weed we must next determine if the weed is a broadleaf plant. A broadleaf plant without going into advance level botany has two cotyledon leaves at germination compared to a non-broadleaf plant which has one cotyledon leave. The vascular bundles arrangement within the stem are different between broadleaf plants and non-broadleaf plants. For field identification, broad leaf plants have broad leaves with network of veins while non-broad-leaf plants have long narrow leaves with parallel veins. All grasses are considered non-broad leaf plants. Identifying if your weed is a broad leaf plant or not is probably the most important step in weed ID. This is because a vast number of herbicides are rated to kill broadleaf weeds while leaving desirable grasses such as Bahia and Bermuda untouched. Example of broadleaf herbicides include Tordon 22K, Grazon Next, Remedy, and 2,4-D. However, if you determine you have a non-broad leaf weed your options for control will be more limited. There are herbicides that will control grasses we consider weeds, but you must ensure you have correct ID, for example the only herbicide that is labeled for use on Smut Grass is Velpar L. You need to also consider your desirable grasses as many herbicides can also cause damage or mortality to desirable grasses such as Bahia and bluestem. It goes without saying correct weed ID is important as it will ensure you apply the right herbicide saving you money and time. But, it also makes us better stewards of the land. By applying the right herbicide for the job, we ensure we are not adding unnecessary herbicides to the environment.

To learn more about Weed ID plan on attending the Beef and Forage Workshop taking place May 17th, 9:00 a.m. at Corrigan City Hall. Dr. Vanessa Corriher-Olson will be discussing weed ID, sprayer calibration, and planning for the upcoming hay season. Other speakers will include Casey Anderson from Anderson Cattle Company, and TSCRA rangers. Cost is $25 if RSVP before May 10th and $30 after. 3 CEU credits will be given and lunch provided. You can RSVP by calling the extension office at 936-327-6828.

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**Summer Food Plots, May 11-17**

Planting a winter food plot for deer is a common management strategy here in Polk County. Hunters will begin to work the ground up during late summer and early fall and by October have a mixture of oats, clover, beets, and other winter forages planted. Winter food plots make sense as they provide supplemental browse for deer during the though times of winter, but also attract deer during hunting season. However, as popular as winter food plots are many hunters do not plant summer food plots.

Summer food plots have some of the same positives as winter food plots. Summer food plots can be an important supplemental source of food for deer, especially during a dry summer. In addition, summer food plots can provide a nutritious source of food when bucks are actively growing their horns. Now I am not saying planting a summer food plot will instantly grow monster bucks, but it does have the potential to provide extra protein. Additionally, it can provide supplemental nutrition to does during the period when fawns are being raised. It should be of note in Polk County where rainfall is usually abundant there may not be much of an advantage for a summer food plot as the woods will be able to provide ample amount of browse. But, in dry years when things begin to turn brown summer food plots can become a mecca for deer and other wildlife. Ironically though, in dry years when summer food plots can be an excellent management tool rainfall is also usually lacking to produce a successful summer food plot. During dry years it could be advantageous to provide irrigation. Planting a summer food plot consist of the same techniques as a winter food plot. You will need to disc, harrow, or perform some tillage activity. Fertilizing and liming can increase production. Next, you can either spread by hand, broadcast, or drill the seed. Lastly, slightly covering or rolling the soil will allow for good seed to soil contact leading to higher germination rates. Planting should occur sometime in mid-spring to early summer depending on what crops are being grown. Crops for summer food plots can consist of cowpeas, grain sorghum, sunflowers, and lablab which is a tropical legume.

If interested in learning more about deer management, make sure to attend the first seminar in the Polk County Game Management Series. The first seminar will be about deer management and the presenter will be Chris Gregory, TPWD Wildlife Biologist for Polk County. The seminar will be at the AgriLIfe Extension meeting room on May 23rd and will start at 10:00 a.m. Cost is free and light refreshments will be served. Please RSVP to the extension office at 936-327-6828.

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**Algae in Ponds, May 18-24**

Any pond owner knows that it is just a matter of time before an algae bloom takes over. Algae blooms are a natural part of any pond ecosystem, but due to environmental conditions can sometimes thrive in ponds. Not only can algae be an eye sore it can cause fish kills. To manage against large algae blooms you must first have a basic understanding of algae biology and its role in a pond ecosystem.

Algae are microscopic plants that make up the base of the food chain in pond ecosystems. These microscopic plants, technically know as phytoplankton, are made up of numerous species and can have upwards of thousands of individuals in just a cup of water. Phytoplankton is then eaten by zooplankton which are microscopic animals. Zooplankton is then eaten by aquatic invertebrates, filter feeders, and fingerlings. Without phytoplankton life would be unable to exist in a pond. So, the next question is if phytoplankton or algae is so essential for pond ecosystems why it is a bad thing if large algae blooms occur? Algae blooms tend to reach larger size in ponds due to their size, depth, and nutrient runoff. Because ponds are usually small in size and relatively shallow it allows for warm water temperatures which is perfect for algae growth. In addition, most ponds have minimal outflow but collect water from a surrounding pasture or field. In Texas this usually means the pond is collecting runoff from either a cow pasture or a fertilized field, which is typically high in nutrients. Due to collecting nutrients in runoff and since outflow is minimal nutrient loads can become very high in ponds. Mix warm water, adequate sun, and high nutrient loads and the result is a large algae bloom. It should also be noted that algae just like any aquatic plant provides habitat for invertebrates and small fish. Like any living organism, algae will eventually die, and this is when fish kills can occur. After death, algae will begin to decompose and be broken down by bacteria. A large algae bloom resulting in a large algae death will lead to an explosion of bacteria in the pond. These bacteria consume the same oxygen required by fish and if the bacteria population becomes large enough dissolved oxygen levels in the pond will drop leading to fish kills.

Most pond owners will need to be concerned about two types of algae classes. The first is planktonic or non-filamentous algae which will discolor the water various shades of green, blue or brown. The other class of algae is filamentous algae which are single cell plants that join to make long visible chains or filaments. Filamentous algae will typically float to the top of the water and form dense matts. Herbicides with active ingredients of copper, endothall, or sodium carbonate are rated good to excellent control for planktonic algae. Herbicides with active ingredients of copper, diquat, endothall, flumioxazin, or sodium carbonate are rated good to excellent to control filamentous algae. Lastly, to prevent a fish kill from killing too much algae at once you should only treat a ¼ pond of the pond on a 10-14 day cycle.

 

Filamentous Algae Planktonic Algae

Pictures taken from aquaplant.tamu.edu

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**Managing Skunk Damage, May 25-31**

Over the past couple of months, I have received several calls from concerned residents about skunks under their houses. Skunks can cause significant damage from their burrowing activities including in gardens and flower beds. In addition, skunks have been known to cause losses to small livestock such as chickens. It should go without saying one of the biggest nuisances from skunks is the smell, but skunks can also transmit diseases. If a skunk has every set-up shop underneath your house, you know they can be quite a nuisance. At this point homeowners are usually looking for a magic fix such as a spray that will make the skunks leave. Unfortunately, there is no product that will get rid of skunks, but you can implement practices to manage skunk damage.

Control is in the form of managing individual skunks when they become a conflict. Control should consist of both environmental control and mechanical control. Environmental control consists of closing openings around your house and preventing skunks form entering underneath your house. Fencing should occur after dark once skunks have left to feed for the night. Fencing skunks out can be accomplished with either sheet metal of hardware cloth. To prevent burrowing underneath the fencing, bury a 30-inch piece of hardware cloth so it extends 12 inches below the surface and 18 inches outward at that depth. Another important step to discourage skunks is to remove food sources. Skunks are omnivorous, meaning they will just about eat anything they can find. This includes grubs, insects, fruit, berries, and mushrooms. Around the house this can include trash and pet food. Make sure to remove unused pet food at night and to keep lids on trash cans.

Mechanical control includes shooting and trapping. Live traps are the most common method to trap skunks, but leghold traps can be used. Popular food items used to trap skunks include apples, pears, or bananas as these food items will attract skunks, but not dogs and cats. Skunks rarely release their scent in darkened areas; thus, you should cover your live trap with burlap or another material that will darken the cage to prevent being sprayed.

Skunks are classified as furbearers in Texas meaning you need a proper license from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to sell the pelt. However, it is legal to trap skunks if they are causing damage or creating a nuisance. If you are wishing to live trap skunks and relocate them on other land you should first notify Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Hopefully a skunk never decides to take up residency at your house, but if they do you can mitigate the damage by following the above environmental and mechanical control methods.

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