**Annual Bluegrass Control in Turf, October 5-11**

Annual bluegrass (*Poa annual)* is the thorn in the side for anyone trying to manage turfgrass, rather that be professionals or homeowners. Contrary to most weeds we battle in our lawns, annual blue grass is a cool season weed that begins growth in fall and by late winter and early spring will be easily visible. To make matters worse it is a grass growing in grass that we don’t won’t to harm, thus limiting herbicide options. Annual bluegrass can thrive in warm season turf grasses such as centipede and St. Augustine, due to lack of competition. Since warm season grasses are dormant during the winter, annual bluegrass does not have to compete for resources such as light, water, and nutrients.

 Annual bluegrass has bright green leaves with a fuzzy white seed head. The seed heads will become abundant as we enter the spring months. This is the time when it becomes easily visible in turf. Annual bluegrass is a true annual plant and will die at the end of its growing season in the spring. Since it is a true annul, production of seeds is essential as plants the following fall will germinate from seeds instead of roots in the ground. Annual bluegrass is also one of the most widespread plants in the world being found from the tip of the earth near the arctic to the warm tropics. Annual bluegrass is also not limited to turf sites but can be found along roadsides, hay fields, and pastures. In other words, if you can grow grass there is a good chance annual bluegrass is present.

 Control is very hard to achieve and requires a well thought management plan prior to infestation. Culture methods are the first step in a management plan. This includes higher mowing height, proper irrigation, aggressive aerification, good soil drainage, avoiding dethatching during germination, preventing compaction, and reducing shade. A pre-emergent herbicide application is the most effective in control. An application should be made around the end of September to the first part of October about the time when we have 3-4 consecutive nights of low temperatures around 650F. Many of these pre-emergent products will require a second application 8-10 weeks later. Turf grass herbicides with the following active ingredients will provide pre-emergent control: benefin, dithiopyr, pendimethalin, prodiamine, benefin with trifluralin, benefin with oryzalin, isoxaben, indaziflan, and oxadiazon. Products containing atrazine will also provide pre-emergent control but should only be applied to St. Augustine and centipede grass. There are some post-emergent herbicide options such as products containing imazapic and sulfosulfuron, however pre-emergent herbicides provide better management control. Lastly, glyphosate can be used to spot treat clumps of annual bluegrass.

 It has been demonstrated that annual bluegrass has begun to develop herbicide resistance. To combat herbicide resistance, you should routinely switch between products with different active ingredients and preferably with different modes of action. To further discuss a management plan, feel free to call the extension office.



Image taken from: <https://aggieturf.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/ESC036.pdf>

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**Pierce’s Disease Tolerant Grapes, October 12-18**

Pierce’s disease can be catastrophic to susceptible grape varieties. Pierce’s disease is caused by a bacterium that clogs the vascular tissue in grape vines. The bacterium will multiply and colonize the vascular veins of the plant and inhibits the movement of water through the grape vine. Grape vines become infected after a sharpshooter insect that acts as a vector for the bacterium feeds on the grape plant. Some of the first symptoms of an infected plant are similar symptoms of heat or drought stress due to the fact the bacteria inhibits water movement. Other symptoms include irregular leaf scorch, uneven periderm formation, and finally cordon die back and vine death. There are no known treatment methods for vines once they become infected.

 Pierce’s disease can be found throughout Texas, but certain areas are more susceptible. The areas with greatest risk include east Texas, south Texas, and along the gulf coast. In other words, in you are planting grapes in Polk County you need to plant tolerant grape varieties. The reason why Pierce’s disease is not a major concern in more northern areas of Texas is because the bacteria is sensitive to the colder winter temperatures making the disease less fatal. Growers in the transition zone in the central part of the state may plant nontolerant varieties but must follow strict management guidelines.

 Unfortunately for growers in our region most European, American, and French American hybrid varieties are susceptible and should not be planted. Interestingly native grape, such as muscadines, are not susceptible to Pierce’s disease. For this reason, many growers in Polk County strictly plant muscadines. Muscadines produce a distinct flavor enjoyed by some consumers, but a large market has yet to develop. This strictly limits the marketable products for muscadine growers. Blanc du Bois and Black Spanish are two tolerant varieties that are widely planted for their commercial wine appeal. Blanc du Bois produces light green round berries that ripen in early July. Grapes form loose clusters which make clusters less susceptible to sour rot. Black Spanish is considered to produce the highest quality red wine of the Pierce’s disease tolerant grape varieties. Clusters are large and compact with small berries. Black Spanish will ripen in mid to late July. Victoria Red is anther tolerant variety that is a seeded table grape that produces good yields. The value of this variety is home fresh fruit production but may be used as a natural blending wine grape. Other tolerant varieties can be planted, but lack commercial appeal. These varieties include Miss Blanc, Miss Blue, MidSouth, Orlando, Seedless, Roucaneuf, Daytona, Conquestador, Stover and Lake Emerald.

 If you are interested in growing grapes for home consumption or as a vineyard come by the extension office for more information on Pierce’s diseases.

 

Image taken from: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/files/2010/10/pd-grapes.pdf>

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**Feral Hog Disease Concerns, October 19-25**

 As the general deer season is now on the horizon and with archery season in full draw many deer hunters will be hitting the woods. Along with harvesting deer many hunters will harvest feral hogs this time of the year. Hunters should keep in mind some serious diseases that feral hogs can transmit and should follow safe handling methods.

 Three diseases are commonly brought up in discussion by hunters as a concern when harvesting feral hogs. These diseases are swine brucellosis, pseudorabies, and tularemia. Swine brucellosis is caused by a bacterium that can be spread amongst feral hogs through breeding and ingestion. When humans contract the bacterium, it is called undulant fever. Symptoms in humans include flu like symptoms. Unlike swine brucellosis, humans cannot contract pseudorabies. However, pseudorabies is a viral disease that can be transmitted to domestic livestock. Symptoms include abortion, mortality in young, coughing, and fever among adult animals. This disease can end in death. Tularemia is commonly called rabbit fever and is caused by a bacterium. Humans contract rabbit fever by direct contact with the bacterium through a wound, eating infected meat, and ticks and biting flies carrying the bacterium. Symptoms in humans include flu like symptoms and swollen lymph nodes. In sever causes other problems can arise such as pneumonia, blood infections, and meningitis. Along with the three diseases discussed above, feral hogs are just like other wild animals and can carry bacterial diseases in fecal matter such as salmonella.

Hunters should practice safe handling methods to reduce the risk of contracting diseases from harvested animals. Even when following handling methods by the book there is always the possibility hunters could still contract a disease. First of all, hunters should avoid processing an animal that shows obvious sings of sickness, lameness, or illness. The best advice to prevent direct contact is to wear a double set of plastic gloves while processing the animal. It is also good practice to wear safety glasses to prevent bodily fluid from coming into contact with your eyes. Avoid puncturing the stomach and intestines to prevent meat from contacting digestive and fecal matter. If meat does come into contact with fecal matter you may want to consider cutting away that section. Also, if possible, use a different knife to gut the hog to avoid cross contamination. Lastly wash hands, all surfaces, and processing tools with a dilute bleach solution. Always cook meat to an internal temperature of 160oF to ensure bacteria are killed.

 Hunters should not let diseases scare them away from harvesting feral hogs. By being aware of diseases that can be present on feral hogs and by following safe handling practices hunters can significantly reduce their risk of contracting a disease.

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**Spanish Moss, October 26- November 1st**

Maybe nothing more represents the deep south then the visual of live oak trees covered with Spanish moss. Spanish moss and antebellum images of the deep south go hand and hand, but did you know Spanish moss can be found in regions far from the deep south? Spanish moss is native to Mexico, Central America, South America, U.S., and the Caribbean. In the U.S., it grows from Texas to Virginia. Spanish moss is found throughout Polk County, but is more common in bottomland areas such as around Lake Livingston and the Trinity and Neches River Bottoms.

Spanish moss (Tillandsia usneoides) is not a moss at all! It is what scientist call a bromeliad. The bromeliad family of plants consists of 3475 know species mainly found in tropical areas of the Americas. Other plants included in this family include some succulents and pineapples. Spanish moss is also an epiphyte, which is the definition of an organism that grows on the surface of a plant but takes moisture and nutrients from the air and rainwater. So contrary to popular belief Spanish moss is not a parasite because it takes no nutrients from trees. As in most cases in botany, classification is very complicated and there are at least five recognized native cultivars and three hybrids. The most common way Spanish moss is propagated is by fragmented pieces called festoons. If a festoon is broken off and carried off by wind or birds, who use it as nest material, it can grow into a full plant. Additionally, the seeds of Spanish moss can float on the wind until they land on a favorable limb.

Wildlife will routinely use Spanish moss. Birds use it for nesting material and frogs and spiders live in it. If you gather Spanish moss beware of insects such as ticks, fleas and chiggers, but experienced collectors know chiggers only invade the moss after it touches the ground. Native American women used it for dresses, while American colonists mixed Spanish moss with mud to make mortar for their houses—some of which are still standing strong. Dried moss makes good tinder for fires, and you can make it into blankets, rope, and mattress filling. Mattresses filled with Spanish moss are noted for staying cool on a warm summer night. In modern gardens it can be used as a mulch. Not only does it cover the soil, but it also can soak up and retain water.

Spanish moss is a unique plant that is easily recognizable by most. So next time you are admiring the draping Spanish moss remember it is an epiphyte not a parasite!

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