

Weed Patrol: It's All in the Timing

Don't be cheated by cheatgrass and other weeds.

by **KINDRA GORDON**

“You’d be amazed at what forage production you can get when you knock out cheatgrass and other weeds.” That’s the advice Lester Nielsen gives to producers looking at their hay and pasture ground this spring.

To knock weeds out, Nielsen, who is with Warne Chemical based in Rapid City, S.D., says the key is all about proper timing. “Early spring is the time to prepare your weed control strategy,” he says.

One of the weedy species being seen more and more is cheatgrass. Nielsen explains that as drought has affected regions during the last seven or eight years, cheatgrass has come in. The cheatgrass problem becomes even more exasperating if areas are overgrazed.

Nielsen explains that cheatgrass is able to establish quickly because it is a winter annual. It germinates in September and, thus, it is one of the first plants to begin growing as the spring weather starts warming up. “It gets a jump start on taking moisture and nutrients out of soil and away from the plants that we want there,” Nielsen says.

Once cheatgrass gets established, he also explains that it puts out a toxin in the soil (an allelopath), which hinders other plants from coming in and growing. “Cheatgrass holds everything else back,” Nielsen says.

Early spray strategy

So, how can you combat cheatgrass? Nielsen says on hayland, pasture and native rangeland there is a treatment to spray a light dose of Roundup® — but this must be done when alfalfa and other perennial grasses are dormant.

“We recommend applying this treatment during the dormant season on days when temperatures reach 50 degrees or higher. The cheatgrass is

A roadside bank covered in ripening cheatgrass in Utah. Cheatgrass can quickly establish in areas that have been severely disturbed by fire or erosion.



Timing critical for grass seeding, too

Proper timing isn't just important for controlling weeds. It's also important for establishing new grass stands. Whether you are looking to reseed a pasture to native grasses, want to establish a food plot mix for wildlife, or are interested in adding native plants and wildflowers for a landscaping project, Jon Mohn of

Prairie Wild, a Cottonwood, Minn.-based forage seed business, says timing is critical to success.

Mohn says the most common mistake he sees made in planting native species is waiting until too late in the growing season. "The best time to get seed in is as soon as the snow is gone. We like May plantings —

and no later than June 15. July is too late because it is usually getting too hot for the seedlings."

Mohn says another key to plantings tends to be diversity. He suggests at least five or six grass species in a pasture mix and 15-16 native species and wildflowers for a rangeland or wildlife habitat seeding.

starting to grow and takes up the Roundup. In the spring there is a window of time for these applications through March," Nielsen explains.

But he cautions that the Roundup application is a small dose — 6 to 8 ounce (oz.) per acre — so Nielsen suggests a very good, calibrated sprayer when applying.

As the spring growing season progresses — usually mid-March through April, Nielsen says Plateau can be spring-applied to actively growing cheatgrass. (It can also be applied in the fall.)

"Plateau is strictly for native grasses and pasture. It won't kill broadleaves like alfalfa, but it's not good for them," Nielsen says.

The recommended application rate is 2 to 6 oz. per acre, and because the application is less specific and won't kill perennial grasses, it can be self-applied, such as with a sprayer on a four-wheeler, according to Nielsen.

"Plateau will do a very good job of taking cheatgrass out of native sod and pasture," he says.

Wait 'til June for others

Regarding other general broadleaf weeds like gumweed and kochia that may be problems in pasture or rangeland, Nielsen says most all of these can be controlled in the month of June. "You want to make sure the majority of your weeds are out of the ground when you spray. A mix of Cimarron with 2, 4-D ester can be good for controlling common weeds," he says.

June is also the ideal month for controlling thistles — but thistles require a more expensive herbicide like Milestone.[®] "The timing for thistles is June because by then most of them are starting to elongate. We want them to grow up and give us more leaf surface when we spray, but we don't want them to have gone to seed yet," Nielsen says.

Nielsen reiterates that many landowners will be surprised by how much more production you get from pastures and rangelands by controlling weeds.

He also points out that if you want to make a piece of land more productive, first control the weeds before thinking about fertilizer — otherwise you are just feeding the weeds.

On another note about fertilizer, Nielsen says, "Tame grasses respond well to fertilizer, but it's really not that beneficial on native grasses. Native plants don't have the genetics to know what to do with it," he says.