

THE FORAGER

Agronomics with livestock in mind!

7 Steps To Fewer Weeds ~

Remove a pound of weeds from a pasture and (in many cases) you actually add a pound of forage. That's the best argument for doing away with pasture weeds you'll ever hear. It's simple, according to Eddie Funderburg of the Oklahoma-based Noble Foundation, who estimates that in areas where pastures go unfertilized the usual productivity is about 2,000 pounds of dry matter per acre per year. If half of this is weeds it equals 1,000 pounds less of a more quality forage unavailable for grazing livestock.

He goes on the state that "Cattle eat most weeds when they are young and tender. But when they (the weeds) get larger they lose their palatability. If cattle would eat them, we couldn't call them weeds."

There is also an issue of quality over quantity. Agronomist Rodney Lym (North Dakota State University) says, "Most weeds are not high in protein and other nutrients livestock need, so a producer is losing quality as well as quantity when livestock are grazing."

Furthermore, grass may grow under weeds, making it more difficult for livestock to even get to the grass – so that grass under weeds is really useless to the animals.

Here is a list of seven "tips" to share with producers who graze their cattle/livestock... ideas for helping to control less-than-desirable plants in a pasture/grazing scheme, so that livestock can obtain [both] quality and quantity nutrition:

1. **DO NOT OVERGRAZE:** Rotate pastures, since overgrazing is one of the biggest causes of weed problems. When a pasture is overgrazed, the desirable forages weaken and the weeds move in. Pastures need to be rested. A good rotation plan can help keep weeds down, while encouraging desirable forages to maintain adequate growth and development. It is also helpful to "patrol" pastures and use a selective weed killer when any problems are observed.
2. **IDENTIFY WEEDS:** There are numerous printed and on-line resources to help with identifying forages and weed species. If a producer knows what weeds they are trying to control they can better determine the best management decisions to deal with the identified weed.
3. **USE THE RIGHT HERBICIDE:** Based on weed identification, a producer can better evaluate available options to deal with control and eradication, while considering the price and efficacy of the herbicide.
4. **CALIBRATE THE SPRAYER:** Producers need to know how much herbicide they are applying per acre, as well

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as the dilution and application rate, to better ensure accuracy according to the product label. Putting on too much can actually harm the quality forages/grasses – while too little often proves ineffective and a waste of the producer's time and money. Producers should check the calibration of equipment prior to actually using any herbicide or other chemical (use water). Additionally, it is critical to read the label and follow all directions carefully as to dilution and application rate(s) and safety concerns.

5. **SPRAY AT THE RIGHT TIME:** The 'right time' to spray for weeds will depend on the weed! As a general rule, spray weeds when they are young and actively growing. There are, however a couple of exceptions that need to be sprayed when they are mature and in full bloom. These include such weeds as nightshade, blackberries and nettles.
6. **WATCH THE WEATHER:** The impact of weather on weed control and spraying a herbicide is critical. There needs to be sufficient soil moisture for weeds to be actively growing, in order for them to take up the herbicide. If conditions are too dry, the herbicide may have little to no impact on the weeds.
7. **DON'T FORGET THE MOWER AND BIOLOGICALS:** In an effective pasture program, producers have learned that it is helpful to mow the field at least once a year, unless it is grazed down close or cut for hay. Mowing may, in some instances, be more effective than herbicides and other chemicals ~ as well as being more economical!

There are many ways to help maintain the quality of pastures, as well as reducing the amount of weeds contained in any given field. Remember: less weeds usually means more quality forage available to the cattle! This can help to better meet their nutritional needs, while maintaining productivity and profitability. Producers may also consider reseeding pastures on a systemic basis, within the context of their overall management program. Numerous quality seed mixes are available to assist this effort. Contact the Renaissance Agronomy office for more information on mixes and pasture management considerations!

(Edited from an article by Becky Mills, The Progressive Farmer – April '10)



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