Effective Weed Control in the Fall?

Fall isn’t just for football games; it’s also a great time to control weeds. Perennial weeds are especially susceptible to herbicide application in the fall but even biennial and certain annual weeds can be effectively controlled in September and October.

Most annual weed species, such as ragweed, kochia, and lambsquarter, are not efficiently controlled in the fall. While herbicide may kill a plant which is still green, these weed species have already produced seed and their demise won’t be as satisfying since seed has already been produced. However, a winter annual, such as cheatgrass, will begin to germinate in the cool fall temperatures. Unlike other annual species which are senescing in the fall, cheatgrass is actively growing which means it will uptake herbicide. This highly invasive weed can be sprayed with various herbicides depending on the site and goal. Glyphosate (Roundup®) and imazapic (Plateau®) can be used if desirable vegetation has become dormant.

Scotch and musk thistle, biennial weeds, are most effectively sprayed in the fall during the rosette life stage. Aminopyralid (Milestone®), aminopyralid+metsulfuron methyl (Opensight®), clopyralid (Transline®), and combination of 2,4-D (several)+dicamba (several) are examples of herbicides used to control these thistles. If large carcasses remain from the past season, herbicide coverage could be poor and mowing may open the canopy to provide better coverage.

A well-timed fall herbicide application can be the best control option for some perennial weeds such as leafy spurge, Canada thistle, Russian knapweed, and Dalmatian toadflax. These weeds move energy (carbohydrates) into extensive root systems in the fall allowing herbicides to translocate to the roots. Common products applied to perennial weeds include aminopyralid, picloram (Tordon®), and clopyralid. Each weed species has unique time periods in which herbicides will be the most effective. For example, aminopyralid will continue to be effective on Canada thistle as long as there is green foliage remaining while leafy spurge should not be sprayed after it stops producing milky sap.

Several lawn and garden weeds can also be controlled in the fall. Dandelions, knotweed, clover, and plantain can be controlled with glyphosate (Roundup®) if plants are green after the grass has gone dormant. If grass is still green, treat the lawn with a product containing 2,4-D, dicamba, triclopyr, and/or quinclorac in the fall. Bindweed may be controlled by a high rate of glyphosate in the fall using the “bucket” method. This involves isolating the vines of the weed into a bucket laying on the ground and basically painting the herbicide mixture onto the leaves. Once the herbicide has dried on the leaves, the bucket can be removed without injury to the grass. Control of bindweed is most effective just before hard frost, mid to low 20 degrees.

It may be easy to get discouraged with fall application as immediate results are not usually noticeable. The effect of these herbicides is best assessed the following spring when stand density, individual stem diameter, and plant vigor will be decreased. The long-term nature of weeds, especially perennials, requires a long-term control strategy. Herbicides exhibiting residual control are important for control of both biennial and perennial weeds since they kill the existing plant in addition to future germinating plants. Similarly, long-term control of perennial weeds includes weakening root carbohydrate reserves over time which is partly achieved by residual herbicide products. Other strategies should be incorporated in all weed management such as encouraging desirable vegetation and proper grazing practices.

For more information, contact your local weed and pest control office or Goshen County Weed and Pest at: (307) 532-3713, gocoweeds@embarqmail.com, or <https://www.facebook.com/gocoweeds>.