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“Time to Control Lawn Burweed”

What is the most aggravating weed found in local lawns? Lawn burweed is by far the one that brings the most complaints. Like other weeds it competes with the lawn grass, but there is another offensive characteristic. The seeds are contained within a spiny fruit that are very painful when stepped upon barefoot. During April and May, when the seeds are mature, the presence of these spines can seriously limit any outdoor activity where the skin might come in contact with the ground.

Lawn burweed can be controlled, but only if there is an understanding of its biology. As with controlling this and other weeds, the proper timing of weed control measures and application methods means the difference between success and failure.

Botanically, burweed is *Soliva pterosperma* and is a broadleaved winter annual. It germinates in late September or early October and grows slowly during midwinter. In February it begins to grow rapidly, forming a low, spreading, fine textured plant. The leaves are so small and narrow that it is sometimes mistaken for a grass. Individual plants can spread to a foot or more in diameter, so only a few can cover a large area and grow together, forming a low mat.

During March and April flowering and seed production begins. Once this weed has changed from the vegetative, or growth stage to the reproductive, or flowering stage it becomes very difficult to control with a weed killer.

Hand pulling is an option if only a few plants are present. Where this method is not feasible, a lawn herbicide can be helpful if applied properly. There are two times of the year, or two opportunities to do something about burweed. A preemergent herbicide applied in late September can help prevent germination or kill young weed seedlings.

A second opportunity to control burweed is right now. In late February, while rapid growth occurs, is the time to make a spray application of a postemergent herbicide.

Select a product that contains a combination of 2,4-D amine + dicamba + MCPP and/or 2,4-DP. This herbicide is known locally as the “three way” combination and has provided almost 100 per cent control of burweed in local studies. There are many formulations and trade names. It is sold as a spray-on broadleaf weed killer. Follow label directions exactly. It should not be used near flowers or other ornamentals. Although labeled for use on most of our permanent lawn species, 2,4-D has been known to cause injury to St. Augustine grass, especially during periods of hot weather.

Question of the Week: Nutgrass is taking over my lawn. Is there anything that can be used to get rid of this weed?

Answer: There are two relatively new products that can be recommended, but you must determine which nutsedge that you have before choosing the one to use. Manage controls most sedges, while Image is recommended for purple nutsedge, which appears to be the worst of the sedges in lawns. Basagran is another herbicide that is sometimes recommended for nutsedge control in lawns. It controls all but the purple species.

In any case, it is too early to apply a herbicide for nutsedge control. Best control is obtained during the warm season when these weeds are most actively growing. Follow label directions closely when using these and other herbicides.