

Weeds and brush can be and in many cases are serious problems in pastures in Texas. Reasons for controlling weeds and brush in our pastures and hay fields include the fact that they can reduce the quantity and quality of the desired forage species. Certain species such as blackberries, dewberries and thistles may exclude livestock from grazing certain areas or consuming contaminated hay.

Control Methods

There are several methods to control weeds and brush including cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical. These methods can be used alone or in most cases in combination with each other. Cultural methods are basically management practices that promote a vigorous, healthy stand of the desired forage. They include proper forage variety selection, good fertilization practices, maintaining an adequate pH and good harvest management, whether by grazing or haying. Soil testing to insure the soil pH, phosphorus and potassium levels are adequate for the forage species is essential.

Mechanical control most often refers to mowing or brush hogging. In combination with other control methods such as good fertilizer and liming practices and herbicides, mowing can be an effective tool in weed and brush management. When used alone, mowing hides a problem but rarely gives good control. Mowing brush like sumac, hedge (Osage Orange) or honey locust can actually make the problem worse. A person can gain slow control over blackberries by timely mowing; namely, from full leaf to blossom in the spring. Even with proper mowing, one should expect control to take several years to make meaningful progress. A late-season mowing of blackberries or other species of brush is only cosmetic and will give no long-term control.

Biological control can be used to control targeted weed species.

Chemical control involves the use of selective herbicides, and generally provides the most effective control of troublesome weeds once they have become established. Before using any herbicide, read and follow label directions to determine appropriate rates, carrier volume and spray additives.

Caution: The herbicides listed are safe on most grasses when used at labeled rates but will kill or injure legumes in a mixed (grass/legume) pasture.

Application

Four methods of herbicide application will be mentioned in this section. They include foliar spray, spot treatment, basal bark and cut stump applications. With any application method utilizing a sprayer, be sure to take the time to calibrate the sprayer and ensure that the sprayer is in good working condition.

Foliar broadcast is the use of a boom type sprayer, boom-buster nozzle, airplane, or helicopter to treat larger weed infestations. Herbicides are usually mixed with water.

With the foliar broadcast, good coverage is essential. Generally, a spray volume of 15 to 20 gallons per acre by ground or 3 to 10 gallons per acre by air is desirable. Check the herbicide label for recommended spray volumes. Foliar applications may not be effective if plants are under stress from drought or other conditions. Do not use diesel as a carrier with foliar applications.

Spot treatment is treating the foliage of individual plants or small areas of infestation. It is usually accomplished with a hand sprayer or handgun. Thorough coverage is essential with many species and herbicides and some desirable vegetation can be damaged if contacted by the spray.

Basal bark treatment is applying herbicide to the lower 12 to 18 inches of the trunk. This type of treatment works best on trees 6 inches or less in diameter. Herbicides will be mixed with oils or diesel and applied until bark is saturated.

Cut stump is the application of herbicide to the freshly cut surface of the brush or tree. Apply treatment immediately after cutting for maximum effectiveness. On trees larger than three inches in diameter, only the outer cambium layer next to the bark will need to be treated.