

AG NOTES

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WEEDS

I get a lot of questions about weeds in flowers, gardens and such. "What can I use to kill this weed with?" Well, there are a lot of choices in most cases. But the results would be terrible.

I had the plant named smooth dock brought by the office. It's pretty spread out through flower and shrubs in raised beds around a house. The question was what could be used to kill it.

First, most of the weeds are broadleaf plants. There are a lot of broadleaf plant killers. They'll kill 'em alright. But before you jump for joy, what are most of the flowers, shrubs and vegetables in the gardens and beds? Broadleaf plants, that's right.

So, the broadleaf weed killers are also broadleaf flower and vegetable killers. That would be a disaster to use a broadleaf weed treatment, then losing or damaging the flowers. And the broadleaf garden vegetables so treated that might survive would be inedible at the very best.

The labels for such controls for such weeds have specific weeds listed, and they may also have specific warnings. In any case, the label is the law.

So, what is the best chemical for weeds in a flower bed or garden? Sweat, that's right, sweat! Sorry, folks, but you've got to pull 'em up, hoe 'em out, or plow 'em out with a tiller or such.



PASTURE WEEDS

I said it before, and I'll say it again. We don't farm the grass. A typical grazing system is no fertilizer, no weed control, no control grazing, grazing the grass down to the ground, and then plenty of questions about broomsedge, sage grass, sedge grass, whatever you want to call it. If you look around this county and Middle Tennessee in general, there's plenty of it, and some stands have taken over to the 100% level.

This stuff is tough. It is a native warm season grass, it has a deep root system, and can tolerate poor fertility and low pH levels. And many of the control measures you hear about from old sources actually don't work or encourages new growth. Here are a few to consider.

Some say burn it. That was an old practice. But in reality, it removes the biomass from the stand and allows sunshine in, and actually encourages new growth. So that's not a good thing.

Some say it needs lime. Well, it may be partially true, but it's not all together the cure. I've seen heavy stands on fields with pH levels in the high 6 range, nearly 7. So, it may help, but there's more to the story.

The rest of that discussion about lime is that phosphorous is tied up in acid soils, so liming helps to make it more available to the desirable plants. Sage grass is tolerant of low fertility, so it becomes the dominant plant in the plant profile. This nutrient helps plants in the photosynthesis process, and it also helps to develop strong efficient root systems.

Chemical controls are available, but some folks hesitate to make the commitment to do what might be the best choice. Eliminate the stand and start over. The best control is glyphosate, but remember it's non-selective, meaning it's going to kill everything, grasses and broadleaf plants including legumes as well.

The farmer has to make some decisions. A soil test can help determine how much plant nutrients N-P-K needs to be added to the field on a per acre basis. That is easy to do and removes the guesswork from the decisions. A pH level is also determined, and lime needs to elevate the pH to the desirable ranges is recommended. When is the best time to add lime? Any time the field is dry enough to get a truck in the field and not get stuck.

That leaves the stand of sage grass itself. It's not going away on its own. So, what do we do? If it's a heavy stand, cut down the old growth and wait for the new growth. In July, when it's growing in the warm season, treat with glyphosate and try to get a good kill of everything there. Then in August, treat again with a second treatment to make sure the kill is solid. Then in late August/early September, no-till the desired forage crop in, applying the NPK to feed the new crop and get a jump-start in any other competition. A light stand of sage grass might be treated with a wick, applying the glyphosate to the growing plant above the good grasses in the field.

Does this work? We've had area farmers in the county and a neighboring county have done this and they have called it successful. They are satisfied with the new stand and there was a good kill of the sage grass.

Once the good grass stand is established, keep it fed and don't over graze or over cut it for hay. Leave five-six inches of leave area so the good forage can feed itself, and allow for the root systems to get really well-established. And if any broadleaf weeds show up later, hit them with a good weed control as well. But that's the next year or two away.

Is this drastic? Think about this old saying. 'If all you ever do is what you've always done, all you'll ever get is what you've always gotten.' One of the farmers told me that the only mistake he made was not doing more. His side-by-side pictures shows the results at a distance. He's done a lot more this past summer and he plans to more this coming year.

