**Weekly Express-News Article**

**By Calvin R. Finch, PhD, SAWS Director, and Horticulturist**

Saturday, March 17, 2012

**“Weed, Weeds Everywhere”**

If there is anything positive about a drought, it is that there isn’t usually a weed problem. With the rain we had this winter most of our landscapes are lush and green with weeds. Here are the options you have to address them:

* It is not the best option but you can apply contact herbicides as quickly as possible. These winter weeds will decline with the heat. The mission in life now is to produce a seed crop. I say this is not the best option because the herbicide may not kill the weeds any faster than warm weather will and the herbicide action may not block seed production.

Use a 2 4-D product such as Wipe Out for the broad-leaf weeds and a grass killer like Poast, Vantage, Over the Top or Grass B Gon for the grassy weeds. Read the label carefully to make sure the herbicide you select will work on the targeted weeds and won’t hurt the lawn or desirable plants around them.

* Look on weed control as an opportunity for exercise. Mow the weeds in your lawn several times. The mowing makes the weeds look good as a winter lawn and it will prevent seed production. A string mower also can cut down a lot of weeds in a short time.

Hand-pull the weeds close to your plants. Pulling bedstraw, henbit, and rescue grass is especially satisfying because they come up by the roots so easily. Throw them in the compost pile so they can contribute to the landscape as compost.

Bedstraw is the sticky vine weed that tangles into and over the top of everything in your shrub border and garden. Using a steel rake to pull it also works. It is great exercise for the arms and upper body.

* If you want to avoid this weed invasion next year; mark your calendar on September 1 to apply a pre-emergent herbicide like Amaze or Portrait.
* We can also expect a new crop of summer weeds to replace the winter weeds as the weather heats up. They may already be emerging. As quickly as possible apply a product like Crabgrass Preventer 2, Weed and Grass Stopper or Amaze to prevent sand burs and crabgrass.

Here are some other weeds that you may be seeing in your lawn and garden. The perennials can be killed by contact herbicide but existing plants will not be killed by pre-emergent herbicides.

Rescue grass is an exotic plant that was imported to Texas to provide grazing for livestock. Unfortunately it has turned out to be a successful weed that reseeds itself every spring after a winter of lush growth. Rescue grass can be mowed to make an attractive winter lawn but it gets very coarse in March as it tries to produce seed.

Henbit has a vining habit like bedstraw but does not grow as fast. It is harder to pull from flower beds and vegetable gardens than bedstraw but is still relatively easy. Henbit has a blue bloom above its round scalloped leaves. This is a weed that competes with wildflowers.

Chickweed grows in the same areas as henbit. It is less vine-like than henbit and is harder to pull up from the ground by the root. Chickweed flowers are white and the leaves are light green. The leaves remind me of mouse ears.

Annual sow thistle – Thistle that has gray-green leaves and yellow flowers. Flowers are quarter-size when they open. Points on ends of leaves are not prickly enough to require gloves to grasp them.

Black medic is a lush clover-like plant that has a small yellow flower. It grows in large clumps in weak lawns or shrub borders. The lush plants are relatively easy to pull up.

Texas dandelion is another winter annual weed that is widespread across our area. Its yellow flower is not as golden as the low growing common dandelion. Both are relatively easy to pull unless they are growing in compacted, dry soil.

Spiny sow thistle – The spines are sharper on this thistle than its cousin the annual sow thistle and the leaves are darker green. Both have yellow flowers. Use gloves to pull this weed.

Common dandelion – This weed is common in our landscapes and in landscapes all over the continent. The golden, quarter size blooms emerge on hollow stems from the flat growing foliage. The leaves are about 4 inches long and ¾ inches wide with sharp (but soft) points on both sides of the leaf. The roots are relatively shallow but the plants can still be difficult to pull up by hand.

Day flower is the lushest among lots of lush weeds. If you use your string mower on day flower you can expect to be showered with moist pieces of the plant. In the right place, day flower might qualify as a spring wildflower. The thick green foliage is attractive and the sky blue flowers look good. Unfortunately the day flower is a tenacious perennial weed that colonizes gardens and shrub borders in our area. It grows to full size in shade but will grow in sun. The roots of day flower are hard to pull by hand.