

The bleakness of winter is quickly disappearing and giving rise to the many beautiful colors of spring. Lawns, pastures and roadside ditches are turning green, and everywhere spring flowers are emerging. Ornamental trees and shrubs such as sand cherry, ornamental pear, forsythia, and flowering quince are in full bloom while daffodils and tulips add a swish of color to our landscape flower borders.



I, like many others, have been noticing an exceptionally large splash of pinkish/purple color sweeping the countryside. People are asking, “What is that beautiful pinkish/purple ground cover flower blooming throughout the landscape? Some have even asked where they can buy it.

I shouldn’t admit it, but I do find this display of bright color

exceptionally striking; however, I can assure you, this is one plant not for the home landscape. I can’t explain why, but this plant is uncommonly ubiquitous compared with prior years. Although highly visible and pretty —it is a weed!

Its genus species name is *Lamium amplexicaule* L, but more commonly it is called henbit. Henbit is a member of the mint family with characteristic square stems. Unfortunately, it was introduced years ago from Eurasia and has become an invasive weed now prevalent throughout Nebraska and most of North America. Henbit is a winter annual. Winter annual weed seeds germinate in the fall, and these tiny seedlings are capable of surviving the winter. Then, as if on steroids, in early spring, the little seedlings speedily grow. Within a few short weeks, they quickly mature, flower, and produce seeds. By late spring or early summer the plants die, but not before they leave a plethora of weed seeds for next season.

Henbit grows six to eight inches tall. The leaves of the henbit are roundish with lobed margins. They measure about one-half inch in size. Henbit blooms in early spring with pinkish, tubular-shaped flowers approximately two-thirds of an inch long. When in bloom, bees and other insects visit the flowers of henbit for nectar. Once pollinated, the flowers of henbit give rise to thousands of seeds. The plant is tolerant of sun or shade and heat or cold. Not only does it grow well from



seed, but it can also grow from small pieces of its stem.

Because of its prolific seed production, henbit often invades turfgrass areas that are not well maintained. Henbit is a broadleaf weed that can usually be destroyed with a 2-4-D herbicide, but it must be done in late fall or very early spring. Since it is now growing aggressively, herbicide control does little. Henbit will soon die, but not before leaving a new supply of seeds. It is best to control the spread of henbit in September by applying a pre-emergent herbicide to the lawn. Otherwise, henbit plants are easy to pull; however, after pulling the plant, remove and destroy it rather than letting it lie on the soil. If left in contact with the soil, it does have the potential of re-rooting.

Keep in mind all herbicides need to be applied according to label directions. Never apply herbicides when outdoor temperatures exceed 80 degrees, when conditions are windy, or when rain is expected to occur within the next twenty-four hours. It is prudent to remember that many other desirable broadleaf ornamentals are currently showing tender, new growth. That makes them extremely vulnerable to herbicide damage.

It is true — beautiful spring colors are filling the landscape. The doldrums of winter are hastily disappearing. Henbit is one of the spring plants offering a splash of color to the countryside. Sadly, it's a weed, and a pesky one at that!