

CHASING GREEN TO CONTROL WEEDS IN NATIVE PASTURES

The greening up of pastures usually is a good sign, except when the green is weeds like cheatgrass in native warm-season grasses.

Early weeds should be controlled in warm-season grass pastures. Weeds remove moisture that could be used for grass growth later on and they remove valuable nutrients from the soil. Early weeds also can develop so much growth that they can shade, smother, and reduce early growth of your pasture grasses.

Herbicides and prescribed burning can control many early weeds, but I think another method actually is better — grazing. Heavy, pre-season grazing costs you nothing. In fact, you get some feed from these weeds while herbicides or burning would only kill and remove growth. Plus, this early pasture might be especially valuable if it saves you from feeding expensive hay.

Chasing green, as some folks call pre-season grazing, will not harm your summer grass — provided you stop grazing before new grass shoots get more than a couple inches tall. This usually doesn't occur until late April or early May in southern Nebraska and slightly later as we move farther north. Early, pre-season grazing of warm-season grass can also remove some old growth from last year, which starts recycling nutrients trapped in dead plant tissue. In fact, about the only bad news about early, pre-season grazing is you have to get fences and water ready earlier, you need to move animals to the pasture, and you won't completely kill out these weeds in one year.

Funny thing, though. These so-called weeds might actually make pretty timely and valuable pasture. Try chasing green with pre-season grazing, I think you'll like it.

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