

FIGHTING THE CHEATGRASS, DOWNY BROME, AND WILD OATS WAR

An invasion of cheatgrass, downy brome, and wild oats has exploded in many pastures this spring. Controlling them isn't easy.

To successfully control winter annual grasses in pastures, you must accomplish two objectives: reduce weed seed production and improve vigor and density of the perennial grass stand.

In pastures dominated by warm-season grasses, spray with glyphosate before warm-season grasses green-up or with Plateau after green-up to control winter annual grasses quite well.

Cool-season pastures are a much different story. Glyphosate can kill the desirable grasses and Plateau can greatly suppress them. So we need to use other methods.

About the only herbicide that might help is Gramoxone. Spray weedy grasses when they form seedheads to kill their top growth and prevent seed formation. Unfortunately, this also will kill top growth of the desirable perennial cool-season grasses. But these grasses will regrow in two or three weeks, much like if they were burned.

A more reasonable approach might be to early graze these weedy grasses as short as possible for as long as animals continue to eat them. This probably means using temporary fences to restrict animals to a small area. Eventually the weedy grasses will become unpalatable as they try to form seedheads and mature. Then animals must be moved to better pasture or be fed hay so desirable grasses get a chance to regrow. During this regrowth period, mow the weedy areas whenever seedheads appear, if possible, to reduce reseeding. Mowing several times instead of grazing is another alternative.

Whatever approach you take, remember to allow desirable perennial grasses adequate time to grow to gain vigor and density.

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