

## Common Weed Issues

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

Release: Week of July 31, 2023

Heat and drought stress have thinned lawns and other areas allowing weeds to invade. Common weed problems at this time of year are yellow nutsedge, purslane, prostrate spurge, knotweed and puncturevine.

Yellow nutsedge is a sedge that resembles a grass. It is often called nutgrass or watergrass. It is yellowish green with glossy, 3-ranked blades that grow faster than turfgrass. The roots produce many small nut-like tubers that sprout to form new plants.

Yellow nutsedge is perennial. Individual plants can live for years and produce hundreds of tubers if not controlled. To manage yellow nutsedge, continuous hand pulling, especially before June 20 to reduce tuber production, is needed. Hand pulling now will reduce nutsedge but tubers remain to sprout.

For herbicide control, which product to use is based on weed type and where the weed is growing. Is the weed a grass like crabgrass or a broadleaf like dandelion? Is it growing in a lawn, garden or shrub border? This is another reason why reading pesticide labels before purchasing is important.

Because sedge is not a grass or broadleaf, there are fewer herbicide choices. Products containing halosulfuron such as Sedgehammer or sulfentrazone like Bonide Sedge Ender can be used in lawns. These are best applied to nutsedge infested turf areas in early to mid-June before tuber production. While herbicide applications can be made in July and August, they are less effective on larger weeds and have little effect on tubers. Tubers will continue to sprout and grow.

Purslane, prostrate spurge, knotweed and puncturevine are annual broadleaf weeds. They grow best during summer and die with the first frost. All four weeds are prostrate meaning they grow low to the ground and spread outward, often from a central root or small taproot. Puncturevine can grow up to ten inches.

As annuals, plants die each year and new plants only grow from seed. Thin turf areas are especially prone to annual weeds as there is less competition to reduce seed germination and shade out young plants.

Purslane is reddish in color with small, fleshy oval leaves. Prostrate spurge has tiny oval leaves, often with a red spot, and thin red stems. Spurge sap is milky. Knotweed has wiry stems with short pointed leaves and a clear sheath at leaf bases. Puncturevine has tiny oval leaves and yellow flowers. The plants form dense mats and produce pointed burs that can puncture bike tires.

With annual weeds, a dense turf and mowing height of three to three and a half inches is helpful in reducing seed germination. Annual weeds have shallow roots and are easy to pull whenever noticed. Removing them before they bloom and produce seed is important in reducing their population. Pulling weeds should be a part of almost every interaction we have with our yards and gardens.

For herbicide control of broadleaf annuals at this time of year, postemergent products applied. Preemergent products, those applied just prior to seed germination, need to be used at the correct time in spring. For knotweed, it is early spring. For the others, mid-May would be a good time.

Postemergent herbicides are applied after seed has germinated and plants are growing. Spot treatment of weeds or infested areas with liquid applications are recommended. Combination herbicides containing 2,4-D plus other herbicides such as triclopyr or dicamba will be more effective than 2,4-D alone.

Along with weeds invading thinned lawns, they are also more likely to grow on compacted soils, low oxygen soils and under low nitrogen conditions. Core aerating lawns on a regular basis along with correct watering and fertilization is an important tool to use in the battle against weeds.