

Common Weed Issues

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There are always weed issues and some weeds are more common than others. Following are weeds I've recently been asked to identify or how to control.

When it comes to control at this time of year, know that most herbicide labels state not to apply the product when temperatures are above 85 degrees Fahrenheit or on windy days. This leads to herbicide drift, either as droplets or as vapor, and damages nontarget plants like vegetables, flowers and trees.

Other than weeds, another common question at this time of year is what is causing my plants leaves to be curled or twisted. In most cases, this is due to herbicide drift injury.

If you see a weed in the lawn or garden at this time of year, the best means of control is often hand-pulling or hoeing. Doing so helps prevent herbicide injury to nearby plants and prevents seed production which leads to continuing weed problems.

Here are a few weeds I've recently been asked about. Purslane has reddish succulent or thick leaves and stems. The stems lay flat on the ground and radiate from a single taproot, forming mats of fleshy leaves. Purslane is an annual, reproducing from seeds and stem pieces. This is a weed that can be controlled or eaten since it is edible.

To control purslane, the number one rule is to not let it go to seed. Seeds of purslane have been known to remain viable for 40 years in soil. Because purslane easily reproduces from stem pieces; when hoeing or hand-pulling plants, remove them from the garden and destroy them. If left in the garden, they will re-root, multiplying the number of plants you have.

Pre-emergent herbicides can be used but needs to be applied in late May since purslane germinates later in the season. If you wish to try purslane as a food source, typically in salads, be sure to wash it thoroughly and that it is free of pesticides.

Clumps of a dark green, wide-bladed grass in Kentucky bluegrass are most likely a forage type of tall fescue. Some homeowners refer to this grass as water grass and it is then confused with yellow nutsedge, which also has the common name of water grass.

However, these two weeds do not resemble one another and are easily distinguishable. Tall fescue has dark green, coarse, wide blades. Yellow nutsedge is finer textured with narrow, yellowish green leaves that are triangular in cross section. Both tend to grow faster than bluegrass.

For tall fescue growing in Kentucky bluegrass lawns, there is no selective control of tall fescue. The clumps need to be removed by digging or sprayed with glyphosate (Roundup) and the area reseeded. Mid to late August is the best time to do this as early September is the ideal time to seed cool season grasses.

Yellow nutsedge is not a true grass and can be selectively controlled with herbicides containing halosulfuron, such as Sedgehammer, especially when applied prior to June 21 or to very young plants.

Hand-pulling can eventually control nutsedge, but know that these plants form small tubers which are left in the soil after pulling. Pulling plants stimulates the tubers to grow. It's important to pull nutsedge as soon as you see it to reduce the chance of tuber development.