



March 31, 2006

## MUSK THISTLE, THE OLD NEMESIS

Did you have musk thistles last year? If so, walk out in those same infected areas this week and check. I'm certain you will find more healthy, robust thistle plants growing in their circular, rosette form which is a noxious weed in the State of Nebraska.

Musk thistle is a nemesis to landowners, particularly those that have pastures and meadows. In fact, thistles can be especially troublesome after drought. Thistles are even mentioned in the Bible so we are talking about a very old foe. Nobody likes musk thistle (except for the butterflies and earthworms). That's why timing is everything in controlling this unruly plant. It reduces forage yields by robbing moisture and plant food from palatable grasses. Livestock refuse to enter heavily infested areas and will not graze close to the spiny plants.

Even if precautions were taken last year to get rid of musk thistles, the unruly plants still can come back this year. The rosette growth form is the ideal stage for controlling these plants. That means spray herbicides soon, while your musk thistle plants still are in that rosette form. Thistles controlled now means less flowering plants that will need control later by digging them up by hand. One of the big problems with musk thistle is folks not treating them in the fall or in early spring with herbicides or by digging them up. Most homeowners get concerned about musk thistle when it does start blooming which is too late to be spraying, as seeds are already set.

Several herbicides are effective and recommended for musk thistle control. One of the most effective is Tordon 22K. However, be especially careful with Tordon since it also can kill woody plants, including trees. Another herbicide that also works very well is 2,4-D. However, better thistle control can be gained by using a little less 2,4-D and adding a small amount of Banvel to the mix.

There also are several newer herbicides that control musk thistle in pastures: Milestone, Transline, Redeem R&P, Overdrive, Ally and Curtail. If unsatisfied with how well other herbicides have worked, give one of these a try. No matter which weed killer is used, be sure to read and follow label instructions and spray on time.

Chris Kelly, the noxious weed control manager for Saline County, handles complaints each year when pink blooms are appearing on neighboring properties and seeds start to fly. As a whole, Saline County landowners are doing an excellent job in controlling musk thistle compared to many years ago.

There is another resource available to area landowners. It is the 2006 UNL Herbicide Guide, available at UNL Extension offices. The authors devote a page to the latest recommendations on noxious weed control in Nebraska.

For more detailed information on noxious weed control, contact the Saline County Weed authority at 821-3326 or Extension in Saline County at 821-2151.



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