

Stickery Things in Shoes and Cuffs

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I've been receiving quite a few phone calls recently about what to do about sandburs. Before I go any further I guess I should say that at this late stage of the summer, there's nothing you can do other than carefully pull them up and throw them in the trash or a burn barrel! But it's a little more complex than that.

First of all, which plant are you referring to? There are two very different plants that people call sandburs. One is a grass plant that has multi-tined burs that get in pant cuffs, socks and shoe laces. This plant is the true sandbur, sometimes called field sandbur, long-spine sandbur or grass sandbur. The other is a broadleaf plant that grows flat on the ground, has little yellow flowers, a single tap root and can grow to be over eight feet across. This plant has a very angular and hard seed with one or two very stout and sharp spines on it. This one tends to get stuck in the soles of your shoes and quickly flattens the tires of bicycles and lawnmowers. This is called puncturevine as well as other choice names if you step barefoot on one of the seeds.

These are both annuals and will die with freezing weather. They start over each year growing from a seed. Crabgrass preventers are going to vary in their ability to control either of these. Sandburs, since they are a grass like crabgrass, are more likely to be at least partially controlled by the pre-emergent preventers. Puncturevine is less likely to be controlled by these preventers.

A key thing to keep in mind is that where you have these weeds this year is where you'll have them next year. They prefer areas with little competition from other plants so they'll often be at the edges of lawns along sidewalks, driveways and curbs. They can tolerate hot and dry locations with compacted or sandy soils. While the seeds are easily carried from location to location they simply can't tolerate much competition.

Go ahead and use your crabgrass preventers at normal time in the spring, but then follow up with monthly treatments for post-emerge weed control starting in early May. Small sandbur plants are going to be controlled by the post emerge crabgrass killers like quinclorac or fenoxaprop-p-ethyl. These are the two active ingredients in most of the crabgrass killers. Both will be effective on small seedlings; quinclorac is not as effective on larger better established plants. Puncturevine will be controlled, post emerge, by any of the lawn broadleaf weed killers like Trimec, Weed-B-Gon and others that contain 2,4-D or dicamba.

The monthly post emerge treatments become very critical because both of these plants can germinate late in the summer and quickly go into reproductive mode, allowing them to produce seed in four to six weeks. Once we get into September, especially the second half of September, germination will really decline because of cooler conditions. But I would treat clear in to early September. These treatments do not have to be lawn wide, just the areas where you have had the problems before. If you follow this approach for two to three years you can pretty well clean up an area.

For now though, all you can do is carefully pull the weeds and put in the trash. Do this carefully as mature puncturevine seed will readily fall off the plant. You may have to carefully clean up the seed left behind with a rake, shovel, broom, maybe even a shop vac. But the more seed you can move out of the area, the fewer seedlings you'll have to deal with next year!