

Weed and Brush Control in Pastures

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Even well managed, regularly burned pastures, will have woody brush invasion. Then take a pasture that maybe gets pushed just a little too hard and you'll have a whole lot of brush and quite a few weeds. The first thing I always point out to pasture managers is that excessive brush and weeds in a pasture is a good sign that the pasture is being over grazed. The weed and brush didn't become a problem in one year and it isn't going to be fixed in one year. It's going to take adjustment of stocking rates, timely burning and timely brush control over the next several years to get the pasture back into shape.

We generally feel that mid June is about as good an all around time to treat woody shrubs as you can get. Most pasture managers do not want to go out in the pasture treating three or four different times a summer to hit the optimal time for controlling the different brush species so the early to mid June time frame seems to be the best alternative. Buckbrush can be sprayed early to mid May with good control. Smooth Sumac is best sprayed in late June. Both of these are relatively easy to control. Rough-leaved dogwood is the hardest of these three to control and mid June is the best time to treat it which ties in well with our recommended treatment date.

If you know that you have a lot of just one species, then you can certainly adjust that timing. If you are spraying the same year that you burned, you probably need to push those times back about three weeks or so. Those recommended dates are meant to coincide with the time that the species is just reaching full leaf stage which is when it is going to be the most vulnerable to herbicide control. If we are dealing with some of the minor brush species like prickly ash or fragrant sumac we can sort of follow these same basic timing guidelines. If you have a lot of tree invasion, including hedge, black locust or honeylocust then we are dealing with a different beast and likely need to be looking at different herbicides and maybe even some different application techniques. There are some new herbicides which are very effective on honeylocust and black locust which we may need to talk about.

For general foliar treatment of the brushy species we are talking about you are going to get the best control with products containing triclopyr and picloram. Yes, the combo products are going to be a little more expensive but I feel that the improvement in control is definitely worth the extra cost. Where most pasture managers fall down is simply in not following the directions on the herbicide products they are using. Use the recommended rates and only adjuvants that are recommended on the list. If you are making foliar sprays, diesel fuel is not a recommended adjuvant. Have you ever sprayed straight diesel fuel on woody shrubs. You'll knock the leaves right off of them with out any long term control. The directions are on there for a reason, follow them.

Finally, weed control. Other than timely spraying for noxious weeds, most so called "weeds" in pastures honestly don't need to be sprayed. They show up so late in the season they aren't a problem - yellow blooming annual broomweed in September and October for example. There are a few that may become an issue like wild licorice, ironweed, and sometimes goldenrod. Early June probably isn't the time to treat any of these so we can talk about them later. It's more important now to focus on adjusting stocking rates and where you place mineral feeders or hay feeders to avoid trampling the same areas over and over!