

## **Managing Weeds In Your Lawn, July 1-7**

We are well into the growing season, and one of the most common questions I get at this time of the year concerns weed control. Even though we have had a slow transition into summer, I bet that we have shifted out of our cool season weeds and into our warm season weeds.

Cool season weeds are annual plants that started their growth in the fall, remain smallish and unobtrusive much of the winter, to then increase their growth and bloom in the spring. When you see the incredible wildflowers along the highways, many are winter annuals. It is the unwanted ryegrass, shepherds' purse, henbit, and others in our lawn that we really don't want to see. Even though the weather has started to warm up, we can still expect to see some holdovers from the cool season such as white clover. While most clovers are gone, the perennial white clover is one of the few that we can expect to see growing into June if rains persist.

Warm season weeds are those who have just germinated (started from seed) and will grow throughout the summer. We'll see them bloom and set seed as the summer months progress. There exists an abundance of weed control products on the shelves at the local feed stores and nurseries. Many brands work just fine, just be sure to read the labels and follow them carefully. Let's be clear that the best deterrent for weeds in the lawn is a healthy, well managed lawn. Healthy, well managed lawns are watered and fertilized correctly. Over watering or over fertilization will lead to all kinds of problems. For certain, a frequent, disciplined mowing routine will encourage turfgrass to spread laterally and have a thick cover that crowds out undesirable weeds.

If you want to treat with an herbicide, there is a broad array of brand names from the major gardening companies. To help simplify the choices, I suggest folks study the active ingredients, and focus on just two: a combination of 2,4-D + dicamba + mecoprop (MCPP), and Atrazine. My current favorite for lawns is the combination of 2,4-D, dicamba, and mecoprop (MCPP). With summer weeds that have already germinated, this combo would be a good one. For years, atrazine was highly recommended to me by a golf course professional as the only product he would use on St. Augustine. Atrazine works best when applied in spring and fall. Let's not forget to be cautious and consider the fact that every shrub, tree, and flower is a broad-leafed plant. And most every lawn herbicide exists to get rid of broad-leafed plants!

When you find yourself with a question or concern about an herbicide, by far the most important resource is the product label. I know the print is tiny and the information is dull to read, but there is so much helpful information to be found. Everyone needs to read the label.

But what if you want to get rid of weeds but do not want to spray an herbicide? Mow every week. Mow twice a week on Bermuda lawns. A good rule of thumb is to water not more than twice a week and only in the mornings when the grass is wet with dew. Fertilize lightly at ½ pound of nitrogen every 1,000 square feet and then only when needed. A healthy lawn is the best defense.

So, what about the weeds still there? From a distance, let's say driving down the city street at 30 miles per hour, those weeds will appear as short green plants that we really cannot distinguish from turfgrass. Any cool season annuals that you may still have are near the end of their life expectancy anyways! Those potential blooms and seed pods that you have just clipped off signal the end of its days.

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### **Summer Lawn Irrigation, July 8-14**

It's officially summertime...hot and dry. Water is a limited resource in Texas, and it will become more limited as the population grows. Homeowners can conserve a significant amount of water with no loss in grass quality by learning to water their lawns properly. Most homeowners (and businesses as well) water their lawns far too frequently, leading to shallow roots and increased disease.

The type of turfgrass you have determines how drought tolerant it is. Being from Africa, Bermudagrass is the most drought-tolerant, followed by zoysiagrass, then centipede and St. Augustine which require the most water.

The time of year also influences irrigation needs. During the summer, when temperatures are high and days are long, lawns generally need supplemental watering. As a rule, lawns in East Texas need one inch of water, applied once a week during the months of June, July, and August only. That's a total of only twelve applications a year. The rest of the year when it's not so hot, our normal rainfall generally sustains them.

Rather than watering on the same schedule each week (or while it's raining), adjust your watering schedule manually, according to the weather. Irrigate deeply. Then wait until the grass

begins to show signs of drought stress before watering again. If it doesn't show marginal drought stress, it should not be irrigated. Symptoms of drought stress include grass leaves turning a dull, gray-green color, leaf blades rolling or folding, and footprints that remain in the grass after walking across the lawn. To properly time watering, look for the area of the lawn that shows water stress first. Water the entire lawn when that area begins to show symptoms. A lawn that is watered deeply should generally be able to go a week between watering (or rainfall). Established lawns with deep, extensive root systems can be watered less often. Some years I don't irrigate my lawn at all.

Early morning is the best time to water. Wind and temperatures are usually the lowest of the day, and water pressure is generally good. That allows water to be applied evenly and with little loss from evaporation. Watering late in the evening, or at night, causes leaves to remain wet for an extended period, which increases the chance for disease, especially brown patch (large patch) and gray leaf spot on St. Augustine and dollar spot on Bermuda and zoysia.

Thoroughly wet the soil to a depth of 6 inches with each watering. Shallow watering produces weak, shallow-rooted grass that is more susceptible to drought stress. Soil type, sprinkler heads, and water pressure determine how much water is needed to wet the soil to a depth of 6 inches and how long a sprinkler must run. Baby food jars, tuna fish/cat food cans, or similar containers can be spaced around the lawn to see how much water is being applied and a hole dug with a sharpshooter shovel will expose how deep the water is penetrating. From personal observation, most homeowner water too frequently (encouraging disease) and don't apply near enough water with each application resulting in shallow rooted lawns prone to drought stress.

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### **Cucumber Facts, July 15-21**

Cucumbers are one of the most popular vegetables consumed. From topping off a fresh salad with sliced cucumbers to a sour pickle treat, cucumbers may be one of the most versatile vegetables. In fact, cucumbers are so versatile they can even be made into cucumber water,

which can be a refreshing drink on a hot Texas summer day. In honor of such a common vegetable this week's article will focus on 6 cucumber facts that you may not know.

1) Michigan and Florida lead the country in cucumber production. In 2021, Michigan produced 31.71% of the cucumbers in the United States, while Florida produced 31.67%. Michigan leads the country in cucumbers grown for pickling, while cucumber production in Florida is dominated by slicing cucumbers.

2) Texas produces approximately 2.5% of the total cucumber production in the United States. At 2.5%, Texas ranks 7<sup>th</sup> amongst states for cucumber production. In 2021, Texas produced 37,100,000 lbs. of cucumbers. Forth Worth based, Best Maid Pickles, has been pickling cucumbers in Texas since the early 1930's. Cucumber fields in west Texas produce over 60% of the pickles Best Maid sells.

3) Cucumbers belong to the cucurbit family of vegetables and are related to other cucurbits like pumpkins, zucchini, summer squash, butternut squash, winter squash, watermelon, and cantaloupe. It is important to know vegetable families because you should avoid growing related vegetables in the same location for at least 2 years. This cultural management practice of crop rotation will reduce insect and disease pressure.

4) The main difference between pickling and slicing cucumbers is pickling varieties have thinner skins, black spines, are shorter in length, and thicker around. While the characteristics of pickling cucumber varieties makes a better pickle, pickling varieties can be eaten fresh. The same is true with slicing varieties of cucumbers, they are best fresh, but can be pickled.

5) Cucumbers do not need to be grown on trellis. In fact, cucumbers can grow just fine on the ground with vines stretching out 6 to 8 feet. Reasons for growing cucumbers on trellis are it decreases space requirements, helps with fungal and other diseases on the cucumber by growing it above the wet ground, and makes for straighter cucumbers.

6) Cucumbers produce more male than female flowers. Male flowers bloom first and appear before the female flowers. For this reason, an abundance of flowers does not necessarily mean an abundance of cucumbers. Many times, a vine can have all male flowers and no female flowers ready to be pollinated.

Cucumbers may be one of the most versatile vegetables consumed in the United States. Next time you are enjoying a pickle, cucumber water, cucumber with ranch, or maybe even cucumber salad with friends you can entertain them with some interesting cucumber facts!



*Cucumber Harvester (Image Credit: Matt Milkovich, Vegetable Growers News)*

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**American Beautyberry, July 22-28**

American beautyberry (*Callicarpa Americana*) is a common to abundant understory shrub found from dense to open forest throughout East Texas and the Southern United States. American Beautyberry also goes by other names such as French mulberry or Spanish mulberry. American beautyberry is an easily recognizable attractive plant that is used occasionally in landscaping. However, the plants benefits goes beyond the attractive nature as American beautyberry is a very important plant for a variety of wildlife.

American beautyberry is a fast growing native perennial shrub that can reach heights of ten feet, but is more typically four to six feet tall. Branches will be light gray to reddish with young twigs having white hairs. Leaves are simple, opposite, oval with coarse, saw-toothed margins. Leaves are two to five inches wide and three to nine inches long. Upper sides of leaves may contain minute hairs, while the bottom sides of leaves will be abundantly hairy. Flowers occur in mid spring to early summer and are inconspicuous and can be blue, violet, pink, or white. American beautyberry steals the show come mid to late summer when the fruit matures to form clusters of purple berries that encircle the stems. By fall the leaves drop and most of

the berries are consumed by wildlife leaving just bare branches present. American beautyberry can be found in loam, sandy, and shallow upland sites and will become the dominant understory scrub in open pine canopy forest. It can also be found in thickets, right of ways, and along fence rows. Since American beautyberry is considered a pioneer species it is most abundant in open forest and will decrease in numbers as forest become denser and sunlight is blocked. For this reason, disturbances such as prescribed fire, forest thinning, brush management, and clearing of right of ways will create ideal growing conditions.

Besides being aesthetically appealing American beautyberry greatest contribution is its benefit to a variety of wildlife. The purple berries are readily consumed by over forty species of songbirds such as American robin, brown thrasher, purple finch, and eastern towhee. The berries are also on the menu for other forest animals including turkey, quail, armadillos, foxes, opossum, raccoons, and squirrels. Lastly, American beautyberry is an important plant for white tail deer. White tail deer will both consume the berries and browse leaves and young twigs. Crude protein values may run as high as eighteen percent in the spring when the plant is growing new leaves and twigs. American beautyberry is rated as having good browse value making it an important species to consider in a white tail deer management plan. Management would include any activity that allows sunlight to reach the forest floor including brush management, prescribed burn and forest thinning. Highest protein content can be achieved in the spring after a cool season prescribed burn. Cattle will also graze on American beautyberry and if present rotational grazing may be needed to ensure seeds have a chance to ripen.

American beautyberry is one of the most common understory plants found in the eastern third of Texas, especially in open canopy forest. However, their benefit to wildlife is often overlooked and are more well known for their vibrant purple berries. Rather you have a native landscaping in your backyard or own a thousand acre forest every effort should be taken to manage for American beautyberry.



*Image Credit: USDA*

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**Brown Recluse Spider: Fact vs Fiction And Tips For Prevention, July 29- August 4**

Any spider can disturb a quiet night or a piddly daytime chore around the house. But the words “brown recluse spider” can elicit an even higher level of anxiety and even fear. Wizzie Brown, [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#) integrated pest management specialist for Travis County, said many concerns about the brown recluse spider have been mythologized, but there are ways to prevent bites and reduce their numbers. Brown is a member of the team of IPM specialists within the AgriLife Extension arm of the [Department of Entomology](#) in the Texas A&M [College of Agriculture and Life Sciences](#). The brown recluse spider can be found inside and outside throughout Texas. They are active from spring through the fall outside but can be active year-round in climate-controlled spaces like homes. The spider has two body regions that are smooth-looking, eight slender legs and typically a light tan to dark, greyish brown color that is uniform, Brown said. Adults are about the size of a quarter to half dollar – legs and all – and have three pairs of eyes on their cephalothorax, the front body section. Many descriptions found online also include mention of the violin-shaped marking on the back, but Brown said those markings are sometimes faint and can be similar to other non-venomous spiders. The size, color and eye-pattern are the best indicators. Their webs are not distinct either and typically sparse with a lack of any pattern, she said. “I hear all the time that they are a lot

smaller than people think they are,” she said. “But the eye pattern is pretty distinctive. Only one other spider group in Texas has that eye pattern, and they are not venomous.”

They are nocturnal hunters and prefer hidden areas that are rarely disturbed, Brown said. Stacks of firewood outside or stored boxes in basements and attics are good examples of places a brown recluse spider might hide, but any crack or crevice in low-traffic areas can shelter them. “They really are shy, thus the name recluse,” she said. “They come out to hunt insects, even other spiders, at night, but otherwise they like hidden areas where they aren’t bothered.” Bites are typically “accidents,” Brown said. Reaching into a wood pile or putting on clothes that have been stored in a closet for extended periods could lead to a defensive bite from a brown recluse. Brown recommends wearing leather gloves when working outside, cleaning out sheds or moving items in an attic or basement. The gloves will protect from a variety of potential issues such as bites from spiders or stings from scorpions. To avoid hiding spiders, seasonal clothes that have been in storage or in a closet for a while should be shaken out well or put in a dryer on high heat for about 45 minutes before they are worn. Brown also recommends checking shoes that have been sitting in a closet. “Summer clothes coming out of winter or vice versa, linens, shoes should all be shaken out,” she said. “A house can offer the perfect habitat for the brown recluse, so you should take steps on the front end to avoid a potential problem with anything that might be in there.” A tip for campers and hikers is to check under the seat when using a primitive bathroom, Brown said.

A brown recluse spider surprise in a shoe or under a toilet seat is nightmare fuel for most, but Brown said bites are rarely as serious as some stories or images portray on the internet. There has never been a confirmed death attributed to the brown recluse spider. And while bites may swell and can break down cellular tissue in the bite area, they are typically akin to any normal wound. Brown said bites should be cleaned and dressed with a topical antibiotic and monitored. Medical attention should be sought for any serious reaction to a bite or wound that is not healing properly. “There are other things like antibiotic-resistant staph infections that look similar to spider bites, but that can be far more gruesome than a bite,” she said. “Some photos presented as brown recluse spider bites are horrible, but anyone can put information and photos on the internet. Unless the person has an allergic reaction to the venom or has some secondary issue that might compound the bite, there is usually not much to worry about.”

An encounter with a brown recluse or any spider can be unsettling, but Brown said there is no need to panic. “If you see one in the house, you can suck them up with a vacuum or squish them with a shoe,” she said. Brown said sticky traps placed along a wall will passively capture them. Spiders and other insects typically follow edges because it is safer. Residual pesticides can be used to kill spiders and other insect pests, Brown said. Sprays should be



concentrated around corners, cracks and crevices. Dust pesticides can also be used but should be applied to areas where the dust can settle and not be disturbed like under the sink or behind large appliances like washing machines. When using pesticides, Brown said be sure to read and follow label directions. Checking seals around doors and windows and locations insects might gain entry is a good way to prevent spiders and other pests from getting in a home. “If there is a recurring problem with brown recluse spiders in a location, I could see the need for action,” she said. “But I know of a house that has regular pest control and would catch hundreds of them, but no one had ever been bitten. They want to avoid an encounter with us as much as we want to avoid an encounter with them.”



*Brown Recluse spiders are a venomous spider whose bite has been mythologized but that prefers to stay hidden away and avoid contact with humans.*

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