

SPRAY FOR BUTTERCUP AND THISTLE

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During the middle of the winter, any thoughts we have about forages usually revolve around hay feeding rather than managing pastures. Pasture management probably won't enter our mind for another couple of months. Now is a good time, however to walk or drive across your pastures and hayfields to find out what kind of winter weeds are present. Weeds like buttercup and musk thistle are easily controlled in a tall fescue or orchardgrass field, as long as they are sprayed before they bloom. The key to getting good control of these weeds is to spray early.

If you find buttercup and thistle in your pastures or hayfields, here are a few important facts that will be helpful for you.

1. When should I spray? Buttercup and thistle can be sprayed this month, if the weather cooperates. Three days of 60 degrees for the high will stimulate these weeds to grow, resulting in an effective herbicide application. If these warm days do not occur, wait until March or April to spray. Remember that the plants need to be sprayed before they bloom.

2. What should I spray? The ester formulation of 2,4-D is very effective in buttercup control. There are several brand names for this chemical, so read the label to make sure you are getting the right herbicide.

3. How much should I spray? Once again, this depends on which brand of 2,4-D ester you get. Most of the brands are formulated with 4 pounds of the active ingredient per gallon of herbicide. This will mean that 2 pints of 2,4-D per acre will be used for buttercup control. Apply the chemical in 20 to 25 gallons of water per acre. The sprayer should have a pressure of 25 to 30 psi. It is important that the label is read carefully, and all instructions are followed, including avoiding drift to sensitive crops and waiting periods for hay cutting.

4. Will this kill my clover? This rate of 2,4-D will not kill established white clover. It will kill all of the seedling white clover and red clover in the pasture. One of the strong points with a December application of 2,4-D is that all residual activity of the herbicide will be gone, and clovers can be planted in February without any problems.

5. Will this kill all of the weeds? This rate of 2,4-D will control buttercup, musk thistle, maretail, and several other weeds. Certain weeds, such as henbit and chickweed will not be controlled. It is important to remember that 2,4-D is only one step in effective weed control. Fertilizing and liming to soil test, and efficient utilization of pastures or hay fields are the primary way to decrease weed pressure.

If you scout the fields now, you won't be surprised in May when you see all of those yellow buttercup flowers or purple thistle heads.