**Primetime**

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Wednesday, March 21, 2012

**“Weeds, Weeds Everywhere”**

With all the rain and mild temperatures after a record setting hot and dry year, winter weeds are very prevalent. The lush growth is a problem for gardeners trying to protect their lawns and gardens from the competition. The weeds also threaten to bury the bluebonnets and other wildflowers that prosper best with relatively dry weather. The plants are growing but not as fast or as large as the weeds.

Most of the weeds described in this column can be prevented by applying a pre-emergent herbicide to your lawn in August or September. Contact herbicides such as Weed B Gon for the broadleaf weeds and Poast or Vantage for the grasses will kill them but it is probably not worthwhile to apply it now. The winter weeds are rushing to produce seed and will probably successfully mature the seed before the herbicide kills them.

Mark your calendar and apply the pre-emergent herbicide such as XL, Amaze or Crabgrass Preventer 2 before they germinate in the autumn. September 1 is usually a good target. The pre-emergent will prevent new plants from seeding but won’t kill existing perennials like day flower or thistle.

The best you can do now is to pull as many as possible by hand and mow or string-mow the rest.

Rescue grass is an exotic plant that was imported to Texas to provide grazing for livestock. Unfortunately it has turned out to be a successful weed that reseeds itself every spring after a winter of lush growth. Rescue grass can be mowed to make an attractive winter lawn but it gets very coarse in March as it tries to produce seed.

Bedstraw actually was used to stuff mattresses in some pioneer homes. It is an annual weed that grows over the top of the plants near it, including Texas columbine and bluebonnets. It favors shade over sun but is not fussy. Pull bedstraw with a steel rake or by hand. Huge growing areas of the sticky vine pack together to become dense clumps for the compost pile.

Henbit has a vining habit like bedstraw but does not grow as fast. It is harder to pull from flower beds and vegetable gardens than bedstraw but is still relatively easy. Henbit has a blue bloom above its round scalloped leaves. This is another weed that competes with wildflowers.

Chickweed grows in the same areas as henbit. It is less vine-like than henbit and is harder to pull up from the ground by the root. Chickweed flowers are white and the leaves are light green. The leaves remind me of mouse ears.

Annual sow thistle – Thistle that has gray-green leaves and yellow flowers. Flowers are quarter-size when they open. Points on ends of leaves are not prickly enough to require gloves to grasp them.

Black medic is a lush clover-like plant that has a small yellow flower. It grows in large clumps in weak lawns or shrub borders. The lush plants are relatively easy to pull up.

Texas dandelion is another winter annual weed that is widespread across our area. Its yellow flower is not as golden as the low growing common dandelion. Both are relatively easy to pull unless they are growing in compacted dry soil.

Spiny sow thistle – The spines are sharper on this thistle than its cousin the annual sow thistle and the leaves are darker green. Both have yellow flowers. Use gloves to pull this weed.

Common dandelion – This weed is common in our landscapes and in landscapes all over the continent. The golden, quarter size blooms emerge on hollow stems from the flat growing foliage. The leaves are about 4 inches long and ¾ inches wide with sharp (but soft) points on both sides of the leaf. The roots are relatively shallow but the plants can still be difficult to pull up by hand.

Day flower is the lushest among lots of lush weeds. If you use your string mower on day flower you can expect to be showered with moist pieces of the plant. In the right place, day flower might qualify as a spring wildflower. The thick green foliage is attractive and the sky blue flowers look good. Unfortunately the day flower is a tenacious perennial weed that colonizes gardens and shrub borders in our area. It grows to full size in shade but will grow in sun. The roots of day flower are hard to pull by hand.