

The Augusta Chronicle

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Do you want to walk barefoot in your lawn this summer? Act now to stop burweed

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

Published 3:31 a.m. ET Feb. 2, 2024 | Updated 3:31 a.m. ET Feb. 2, 2024

In my regular walkabout in my yard yesterday, I spent some nerdy extension agent time assessing the different weeds that were growing in my lawn and flower beds. I did hit the whole yard well with a preemergence in early fall, but there are definitely some weeds that have either built up a resistance or just weren't affected by the type chemical I used.

With all this wet weather, the "po anna" (*Poa annua*) or annual bluegrass is all over the place. It is easily our most prolific cool season weedy annual grass.

The bright green short-growing grass begins germinating when soil temperatures fall below 70 degrees in the autumn. With a clumping form, poa prefers moist, shady areas and does well on compacted soils. Each plant produces hundreds of seeds that lay dormant during the warm season ready to run the cycle again each fall.

Preemergent herbicides are usually the best way to prevent poa, but the plant has been very good at building resistance to commonly used chemicals. As you might see from my first paragraph, the Prodiamine I used in the fall didn't seem to work all that well on my poa annua.

Golf courses are having a very hard time with poa building chemical resistance. For treatment of annual bluegrass in turf, atrazine is good on all of our warm season grasses with a caveat. Bermuda has to be dormant to apply atrazine.

Poa doesn't bother me too much in my personal landscape during the cool season, but there is one that I am on a mission to eliminate, lawn burweed. This winter annual weed germinates in the fall and remains small and mostly inconspicuous. When spring comes and the soil begins to warm, burweed jumps and begins to fill rapidly.

This low-growing pest has leaves that would remind one a little of compact parsley and forms mats. The mats look like they would be soft, but beware. During this time of rapid growth, the plant forms spiny burrs in its' leaves which contains the seed. When you step on this seed pod with no shoes, you will regret it. I receive a lot of calls from concerned yard goers say their dogs refuse to go out in the yard because of these burrs.

Campbell Vaughn: Early blooming plants offer a tease of the approaching spring

I actually have some in my yard in an area that got beat up during construction and left the grass sparse. The burweed doesn't do great in areas where the turf is thick. It can't compete for water, light and nutrients so, a healthy lawn will help eliminate some of these issues. Obviously easier said than done.

Burweed is going to die out when the temperature gets up to 90, but that is a long time away. Do whatever you can to get rid of this weed before it puts on the nasty burrs in the spring. This is another weed that atrazine is good for killing. January through March is best because you can get it before it produces the burrs and with burrs means seeds for next year's crop of these foot-torturing devices.

It is also important to get these herbicides out before our warm season grasses come out of dormancy because you can really stunt green up. Spring green up timing can be all over the place depending on what grass you have and what the groundhog has to say.

Campbell Vaughn is an agriculture and natural resources agent for the UGA extension service.