

## “Fall Buttercup Control”

Ask an elementary school student to name the state flower, and they will hopefully respond with the Iris (our state cultivated flower), or if they are really on the ball they might even mention the Passion Flower (our state wildflower). While both of these plants can be found across Tennessee and add to the beauty of our state, there is another plant that might be even brighter and more plentiful. That plant is the buttercup, and each spring it forms a sea of yellow across pastures and hayfields in Tennessee.

Although a relative of the buttercups that grow in many flower beds in Smith County, the buttercup that grows in pastures and hayfields is a different species of the genus *Ranunculus*. It is considered a weed since it provides no benefit to livestock, and instead consumes valuable water and nutrients. A healthy stand of grass is the best defense against any weed, so if you have a buttercup problem check your fertility by having your soil tested. The University of Tennessee lab will analyze your soil for a small fee and make fertility and lime recommendations.

In some situations, herbicides will be needed to control buttercup in pastures and hayfields. Historically, the vast majority of applications for control of buttercups have been in March to early-April. However, University of Tennessee research and producer experience has shown that fall (late October to mid-December) may actually be a better time to spray. Although not easy to spot without the bright yellow blooms, buttercups are actually emerging right now. Like most weeds, it will be much easier to control them now while they are small and actively growing.

Another benefit to spraying in the fall is that oftentimes in the late-winter to spring it is very wet and windy, making it difficult to spray before winter annuals such as buttercup are in bloom. Many producers may have more available time to spray in the fall, compared to the spring. Time consuming late-winter to early-spring activities such as calving, spreading fertilizer and getting ground ready for row crop planting often make it difficult to get pastures and hay fields sprayed on a timely basis. Last, but certainly not least, fewer broadleaf crops, gardens and active greenhouses are present now; this means the risk of off-target damage to sensitive plants is lower.

In most cases, 2, 4-D ester at 1 qt/acre provides excellent control of annual buttercups in the fall or spring. Favorable weather (3 days of day time highs of 60 F); plenty of water (at least 20 gallons per acre spray volume); and the addition of a good, nonionic surfactant (1 qt/100 gallons of spray mix) are all important ingredients in success. An added bonus for the fall spray program is that it is also a very good time of the year to control musk thistle, buckhorn plantain and wild turnip. If buckhorn plantain is severe, consider increasing the rate of 2, 4-D and coming back with a cleanup spray in the spring.

Keep in mind that 2, 4-D, unlike some other pasture herbicides, breaks down relatively quickly in soil. A benefit of this is that with fall applications of 2, 4-D, clovers can be planted the following February. Always remember to thoroughly read the herbicide label before application and follow all directions and precautions.

While the buttercups in fields may look nice to some passing by, to farmers they are a nuisance weed that will cost money through lost production and by having to control them. If you'd like more information about weed control options, stop by the University of Tennessee Extension office or give us a call at 615-735-2900.