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Musk Thistle Season

As a biennial or winter annual species, spring is when we start to see musk thistle plants really start to take off and grow. Because of their growth habit, we often have the best opportunity for control in the fall. If that wasn't possible, or there were potential escapes, spring options are still available.

If a controlled burn has been a part of your management program this spring, you likely didn't control much musk thistle, but the removal of leaf litter can increase the opportunity for good spray coverage following the burn. Areas with musk thistle should be sprayed about 10-14 days post burn.

Musk thistle plants are most easily controlled by herbicides during the seedling and rosette stages of growth, with many common herbicides very effective at this stage. Good coverage is essential, but a number of products with active ingredients, such as 2,4-D, dicamba, picloram, metsulfuron, chlorsulfuron, and aminopyralid can all have good results.

Once plants have begun to bolt, combinations of the above products are likely more effective. Multiple active ingredient products will be needed as the plants begin to grow upward.

Although some herbicides have shown some ability to reduce seed viability, control shouldn't be delayed until bloom. Even with herbicides that have been shown to reduce viability, it is unlikely seed production will be eliminated. Get musk thistle controlled now, while still in the rosette stage for best results.

For additional control information, check out the 2021 KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide available via any of our District Extension Offices or online. Your local County Noxious Weed Director is a great source of information and assistance as well.

Mowing Height – Cool Season Grasses

Mowing is a whole lot more enjoyable when you have a lush, green turf stand, and the health of that stand is often affected by mowing height. As our cool season turf grasses (bluegrass, fescue, etc...) take off and grow right now, make sure you have your mower deck set at an appropriate height to encourage good turf grass health.

For Kentucky bluegrass lawns, keep mowing height at two to three inches. Tall fescue lawns should be mowed at three to three and a half inches. If you want to mow as low as an inch and a half the first mowing, that may help remove some old dead grass and speed green up slightly, but don't do it for much more than a cutting. Keep mowing heights at that three-inch level for the remainder of the season.

If you're tempted to drop mowing height, keep in mind the potential results. Crabgrass seed has to have light to germinate. Higher mowing heights help shade soil to reduce light for germination. Grass root depth and mowing height are also directly related. The higher the height of cut, the deeper the root system. Deeper root systems equal more drought-resistant turf.