

# Virginia Cooperative Extension

Extension Service for the Commonwealth

## Weed Control in Pastures

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Weeds are a common problem in our pastures. Weeds decrease the quality and quantity of forage in the pasture, and some weeds are toxic to livestock. In general, weeds are bad. There are a few simple steps that you can take to take care of weeds in your pasture.



### Feed the Grass! (If it is hungry!)

Many times weeds become a problem when the pasture is lacking in some nutrient that is necessary for optimum grass growth. Most weeds are troublesome due to their ability to adapt to adverse conditions, and many will do just fine in low fertility and low pH situations. In order to avoid this situation, all that you need to do is take a soil fertility test every two or three years, and then lime and fertilize according to your pasture's needs. Don't skip the soil test and guess at it! If you apply too much lime or fertilizer, you are wasting money, time, and effort! A soil pH that is too high can also promote weed growth. Excessive fertilizer applications are wasteful and can cause a negative impact on water quality.

### Grazing Management

Many times, weeds become a problem in pastures due to poor grazing management. Both over-grazed and under-grazed pastures can weaken the grass and allow weeds an opportunity to come in. In general, an Orchardgrass or Tall Fescue pasture should be maintained at a height between five and ten inches for optimum pasture health and quality.



### Identify those weeds!

Before attempting to control weeds, it is important to know what it is that you are trying to control. Different weeds are more or less susceptible to different control methods. Some can be controlled easily with a bush-hog at the right time. Others, however, might need to be sprayed with a herbicide at a specific time to be controlled. Knowing what it is that you are up against is key to winning the battle. Your local Extension Agent can assist you in the identification of unknown weeds.

### Pick your Method of Control

There are several options available for controlling weeds in pastures. Mechanical control is simply using a bush-hog or your two hands to cut or pull the weeds. Biological control can be used to control Thistles in a pasture. A type of weevil can be released which will gradually eat up the thistles in your pasture. Contact your local Extension Office for more information on the Thistle Weevil program. Herbicides should be used only when all other options have been considered. Decisions about which herbicide should be used and when it should be applied should be made according to the recommendations of the Virginia Pest Management Guide. Copies of this guide are available from Virginia Tech. For an order form, contact your local Extension Office.



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