

NEWS RELEASE
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TARWEED CONTROL – NOW IS THE TIME

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE
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After battling tarweed the past two weekends, it seems a good idea to share what we know about this weed. Yellow tarweed, *Holocarpha virgata*, is a native plant that is well adapted to the hot dry summers in the foothills. Tarweed is in the composite (sunflower) family. In the summer tarweed's aromatic summer growth is sometimes tall and sticky. It is not palatable to livestock and coats the faces and legs of livestock with a tarry resin. Livestock use tarweed in winter and early spring while it is young and succulent. Use decreases rapidly as it increases in height and resin covering.

Control

Reducing Tarweed Density

These techniques can greatly reduce a population of tarweed, leaving very few plants to flower and set seed. However, the timing of these activities is critical.

Mechanical:

Mowing to four inches in May reduced tarweed by 20%; mowing in July reduced tarweed by 90%, whereas mowing in late August eliminated all but a few prostrate plants. Density in the year following late summer mowing was reduced by 90%.

Chemical:

University of California researchers, using 1.5 lb/acre of low volatile ester of 2,4-D found that tarweed was affected much more by herbicide treatment before elongation (April 21) than after elongation (July 14). Because legal restrictions on herbicides are constantly changing, you should contact your Ag Commissioner before using any chemical control method.

To be successful, the use of either method must be long-term (over five years) to totally eliminate tarweed; otherwise the pasture will be reinfested once the eradication project ends.

Growth and Reproduction

Tarweed germination starts in the fall with the first rains and continues into April. By the end of the winter, the tarweed plant has developed a deep taproot and about a dozen broad leaves in a rosette. Roots of tarweed go deeper than most of the winter annual grasses, reducing competition with them for soil nutrients and moisture. In August and September tarweed produces composite heads that have three to five ray flowers and three to twelve disk flowers. The seeds mature by the end of September. Seed dispersal is caused by rain, wind, and wildlife and continues into the winter. Ground squirrels eat the seeds, which have over 20% crude protein. Instead of being a highly competitive invader like some alien annual grasses, tarweed seems to have been able to invade the annual grassland by taking advantage of underused resources of moisture, nutrients and light.

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