Yarrow (Achillea millefolium) is a successful and serious weed of managed turf. By nature all broad-leaved plants in managed turf will display at least some of well-established turf weed attributes but yarrow has virtually the lot.

Yarrow profiled

Yarrow is a ubiquitous perennial weed occurring in most types of grassland. The name yarrow is derived from the Anglo Saxon 'gyraw' or 'giewan' meaning 'to be ready' (because of its healing properties) and turf managers faced with this weed should certainly be ready for a difficult time.

Yarrow flourish on dry, sandy and undernourished soils, chalky or slightly acidic in reaction. Along with white clover and cat’s ear, yarrow is one of the most drought hardy of all turf weeds. During long hot summers, yarrow will persist as broad green patches while most other plants, turf grasses and weeds alike, are dried out, brown and seemingly dead. Beneath the soil lays a sturdy system of underground stems called rhizomes spreading laterally from the parent plant at 7 to 20 cm a year and a deep fibrous root system which anchors plants securely in the turf grass sward.

This erect, tough and aromatic perennial is usually 30-60 cm high in uncut swards, forming umbel-like clusters of white flowers each composed of many florets. This places yarrow firmly in the Asteraceae (Compositae) ‘camp’. Individual flowers are 3-6mm across with white or cream coloured disc florets, and five pink-ish purple ray florets. Like most other members of the Asteraceae, including dandelion and ragwort, yarrow displays high seed production with up to 6,000 seeds per plant.

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The finely dissected fern-like leaves of yarrow give extra clues to its classification status because they resemble the feathery, lace-like and highly segmented leaves of other members of the Asteraceae such as scentless mayweed, corn chamomile, pineapple weed and ragwort. The alternative common name ‘Milfoil’ derived from yarrow’s Latin name ‘millefolium’ literally means ‘thousand leaf’.

In the wider environment

Yarrow in flower is a common sight on infrequently mown grass or waste ground but hardly so on well-managed turf. Regular mowing ensures the white flat flower heads are rarely seen in sports and amenity turf. And this together with a late and relatively short flowering season covering June-September should help to curtail its spread. But the secret of yarrow’s success as with so many other turf weeds does not necessarily lie in sexual reproduction and the setting and dissemination of seed.

Ground hugging rosettes of stalked basal leaves, which largely escape the mower blades, hide an underground system of prostrate stems which develop into soil surface creeping stems (stolons) that root readily at the nodes. In contrast, leaves borne on flowering stems are without stalks and finely dissected fern-like leaves giving extra clues to its classification status because they resemble the feathery, lace-like and highly segmented leaves of other members of the Asteraceae such as scentless mayweed, corn chamomile, pineapple weed and ragwort. The alternative common name ‘Milfoil’ derived from yarrow’s Latin name ‘millefolium’ literally means ‘thousand leaf’.

Back on the sports turf surface yarrow is noticeably difficult to control and a single application of herbicide is rarely sufficient to eliminate the weed. It’s creeping, running stems root at intervals to produce large drought resistant patches of weed growth during hot and dry summers when turf grasses and most other weeds alike are stopped dead in their tracks. There is little that can be done because herbicide application is clearly not effective or advised during drought conditions.

When the rains resume in early autumn yarrow clearly has a head start over drought stricken grass and by late September turf grass swards may be riddled with the weed. The leaves are waxy which together with their finely divided structure makes them difficult to wet and therefore difficult to control and a single application of herbicide is rarely sufficient to eliminate the weed. It’s creeping, running stems root at intervals to produce large drought resistant patches of weed growth during hot and dry summers when turf grasses and most other weeds alike are stopped dead in their tracks. There is little that can be done because herbicide application is clearly not effective or advised during drought conditions.

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Avoid the Yarrow March

Dr Terry Mabbett looks at Yarrow, the turf weed with it all

Yarrow (Achillea millefolium) is a successful and serious weed of managed turf. By nature all broad-leaved plants in managed turf will display at least some of well-established attributes related to its leaves and stems which root at the nodes and surface spreading creeping stems (stolons) that root developing into soil surface production through prostrate stems which develop into soil surface rosettes of underground stems (rhizomes) and surface creeping stems which root at the nodes and like most members of the plant family Asteraceae (better known as Compositae) prolific seed production.

However, there is another key attribute related to its leaves and accounting for much of yarrow’s success and prowess as a weed of managed turf. Yarrow’s waxy and finely divided fern-like leaves contribute to the plant’s strong resistance and high tolerance to herbicide because the foliage is hard to wet and therefore difficult to adequately cover with spray.

Yarrow profiled

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Yarrow flourishes on dry, sandy and undernourished soils, calcareous or slightly acidic in reaction. Along with white clover and cat’s chamomile, pineapple weed and ragwort, yarrow displays high seed production with up to 6000 seeds per plant. And the finely dissected fern-like leaves of yarrow give extra clues to its classification status because they resemble the feathery, lace-like and highly segmented leaves of other members of the Asteraceae such as scentless mayweed, corn chamomile, pineapple weed and ragwort. The alternative common name ‘Milli’ derived from yarrow’s Latin name ‘millefolium’ literally means ‘thousand leaf’.

In the wider environment

Yarrow in flower is a common sight on infrequently mown grass or waste ground but hardly so on well-managed turf. Regular mowing ensures the white flat flower heads are rarely seen in sports and amenity turf. And this together with a late and relatively short flowering window covering June-September should help to curtail its spread. But the secret of yarrow’s success as with so many other turf weeds does not necessarily lie in sexual reproduction and the setting and dissemination of seed.

Ground hugging rosettes of shelled basal leaves, which largely escape the mower blades, hide an efficient means of vegetative reproduction—prostrate stems which develop into soil surface creeping stems (stolons) that root readily at the nodes. In contrast, leaves borne on flowering stems are without stalks. The tough and fine-cut form of the yarrow leaf minimises loss of water by evaporation.

Yarrow has healing properties and when the leaf segments are crushed they release a strong and when the leaf segments are crushed they release a strong though not unpleasant aromatic smell claimed to provide at least one good use for this troublesome weed in another time and place. Yarrow is claimed as excellent fodder for farm animals, and some dairy farmers encourage yarrow in their pastures to impart a pleasant taste to cow’s milk and yarrow flavoured yoghurt thus made. Yarrow was popular as a cooked leaf vegetable in the sixteenth century.

Back to basics on managed turf

Back on the sports turf surface yarrow is notoriously difficult to control and a single application of herbicide is rarely sufficient to eliminate the weed. It’s creeping, running stems root at intervals to produce large drought resistant patches of weed growth during hot and dry summers when turf grasses and most other weeds alike are stopped dead in their tracks. There is little that can be done because herbicide application is clearly not effective or advised during drought conditions.

When the rains resume in early autumn yarrow clearly has a head start over drought stricken grass and by late September turf grass swarms may be riddled with the weed. The leaves are waxy which together with their finely divided structure makes them difficult to wet and cover with spray, as well as presenting a barrier to the entry of systemically acting (translocated) herbicides.

It is not a good idea to rely solely on herbicides for control of yarrow since the majority will struggle to eliminate this weed, especially with a single spray application. Carefully prise out isolated yarrow plants when they first appear and scourly (gnaw) the turf to raise the weed leaves prior to mowing. Nitrogen rich fertilizer in spring helps the grass to get a head start over yarrow.

Regular feeding and watering, especially during drought, maintains sward thickness and helps to suppress this aggressive weed. Round off the growing season with scarify (groom) the turf to raise plants when they first appear and easily (gnaw) the turf to raise plants when they first appear and when the leaf segments are crushed they release a strong though not unpleasant aromatic smell claimed to provide at least one good use for this troublesome weed in another time and place. Yarrow is claimed as excellent fodder for farm animals, and some dairy farmers encourage yarrow in their pastures to impart a pleasant taste to cow’s milk and yarrow flavoured yoghurt thus made. Yarrow was popular as a cooked leaf vegetable in the sixteenth century.

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is complex with various factors at work either on their own or in combination. Thus weeds like yarrow which are difficult to control with herbicides may:

- Be hard to wet and coher with spray due to shape and disposition shape or surface properties of the foliage.
- Be a barrier to herbicide penetration due to a wax bloom layer, a thick cuticle or hairs on the leaves or a combination of such surface properties.
- Be inherently resistant to herbicide due to aspects of natural metabolism like having specific enzymes that can detoxify a specific herbicide molecule.
- Have acquired resistance to specific selective herbicides due to their over use and abuse.

Product Labels of some single active ingredient herbicides claim control of yarrow but only by using the highest allowed dosage or repeat applications and often both.

Biggest and best clout is delivered by herbicide products containing two or more active ingredients usually with completely different modes of action, but even these can come with some reservation over rapid and complete control of yarrow.

Fluroxpyr and florasulam in combination. The ultimate in strength, quality, durability and ease of operation.

- Yes it will fill aeration holes
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- By using the brush regularly, every 2 to 3 weeks, you can virtually eliminate verti grooming
- Use before mowing increases puting speed and smoothness

"The TB 200 Turf Brush is one of the most effective grooming tools I have purchased in my 30 or so years as a greenkeeper."

"I never thought there could be anything better than what I was using, then you brought me the TB 200 and we are able to do better or work with one less brush."