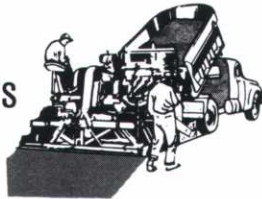


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COMMON WEED IS A NATURAL HERBICIDE:

Could Control Weeds In In Citrus Groves, IFAS Scientist Says

By Julie Graddy

LAKE ALFRED — Lantana, a common weed found in Florida citrus groves, contains phenol-like compounds that kill other weeds, says the scientist at the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) who recently was the first to report its natural herbicide characteristics.

The discovery may offer a "Cheaper, and more ecologically sound approach to future weed control in groves," says Dr. Megh Singh, a weed scientist at the IFAS Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred. Lantana is one of several weeds that Singh is researching for its natural weed-killing abilities.

The yearly cost of weed control on hundreds of thousands of Florida acres is significant, Singh says. A grower will typically spend about \$100 a year per acre on weed control, he adds.

"Using allelochemicals from lantana and other plants could save as much as 40 percent over synthetic herbicide products," Singh says. Further research needs to be done, he adds.

Since the weed-killing compounds in lantana are easily biodegradable, they offer a more "ecologically sound" approach to weed control in groves, says Singh. Natural compounds, such as those in lantana, are also in high demand from agricultural chemists who seek them as a base for commercially produced herbicides, he adds.

Singh began researching lantana's chemical properties three years ago after noticing that ground close to lantana was nearly clean of other types of weeds.

"We surmised that lantana, through its natural growing habits, was releasing some type of compound that limits the germination and growth of other weeds," Singh says. He found that the weed-killing compounds naturally present in lantana are phenols, which are similar to synthetic-based chemicals in some herbicides.

The weed-killing compounds are released even if lantana is simply disked in. They are only potent for 4 to 6 weeks, while synthetic chemicals last up to 4-6 months, Singh says. ■