

PROBLEM MANAGEMENT

by Balakrishna Rao, Ph.D.

Preventing winter rabbit damage

Problem: We get a number of calls from our customers to protect ornamental plants from rabbit feeding injury during winter. What do you recommend for managing rabbits in the landscape? (Ohio)

Solution: Rabbits can cause extensive damage to ornamental and fruit trees when their source of food becomes scarce in the winter months. Generally, they prefer tender new growth to feed, but during winter months they feed on bark and may girdle the plants. The loss of bark, depending on the extent of the injury, can result in the death of the tree, or may result in poor vitality and increased susceptibility to diseases.

Repellents are possibly the best means of preventing rabbit damage. Repellents applied to plants on a warm day in the fall will protect the trees all winter. In many situations, one application is sufficient, though two applications provides additional protection.

Repellents should be applied to the trunk and/or low-growing branches within the reach of rabbits when snow accumulates. A number of commercial formulations are available in the market. Some can be sprayed while others need to be painted on with a brush.

Other methods recommended in the literature are shooting, trapping, protective covers around trees and installing fences around areas to be protected from rabbits. These methods would be preferred in areas where chemical control is not practical.

Getting control of barnyardgrass

Problem: I run a small business that has a big problem with water grass. It seems to be taking over more and more of our properties. The controls I've been using seem to slowly dispose of the other weeds but not the water grass. Please help! (Missouri)

Solution: The water grass you are referring to is probably barnyardgrass (*Echinochloa crusgalli*), which is also known as Panic-grass, Cockspur-grass, and Cocks-foot.

Barnyardgrass is a common annual weed with a coarse growing habit. Plants are erect or reclining with clumps two to four feet wide and blades 1/2 inch or more wide and one foot or more in length. They produce heavy, coarse panicles, usually purplish in color.

Barnyardgrass is a monocot that requires a pre-emergence material for control. Try Betasan, Dacthal, or Pre-M. These products will help you manage the water grass plants as they emerge from the seed. Like crabgrass management, early spring treatment is recommended to manage water grass.

Remember that a few weeds may germinate after the residual effect of the first pre-emergence herbicide treatment is gone. If the problem is severe, consider treating with post-emergence annual grass

management products like Acclaim, Daconate 6, Prograss, DSMA, or MSMA when the plants are very young.

In some situations, you may not be able to kill the plant. However, the treatment may stress the plant and inhibit seed production for future infestation.

Homemade mealy bug remedies

Problem: Can a home plant grower mix up his own concoction for mealybugs and spider mites? What chemicals or household products are involved in such a spray remedy? (Wisconsin)

Solution: I am not familiar with any articles published in professional journals about "home concoctions" and their effect on mealy bugs or spider mites. However, some people may be trying different household products and may have found variable results.

You may find some information concerning homemade concoctions in consumer publications by Jerry Baker, who talks about that type of pest management approach. His books are available in the garden departments of retail stores.

For mealybugs, I would recommend that you use horticultural oil as a dormant treatment in the spring. Later on use chemicals such as malathion, Orthene, Sevin, or insecticidal soap when overwintering nymphs become active in mid-May, June 1 and/or in late July as needed. **LM**



Balakrishna Rao is Director of Lawn Care Technical Resources for The Davey Tree Co., Kent, Ohio.

Questions should be mailed to Problem Management, Landscape Management, 7500 Old Oak Boulevard, Cleveland, OH 44130. Please allow 2-3 months for an answer to appear in the magazine.