

# ASK THE EXPERT

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## Sandburs a prickly problem

**Problem:** In the past year I have taken over the landscape management of two cemeteries that are plagued with grass burrs or sandburs. The problem gets worse the more I mow them. The soil is sandy-clay and slightly alkaline. We do not fertilize due to budgetary constraints and the frequent mowing. (Texas)

**Solution:** It is not clear what kind of sandbur you are dealing with. A USDA book, "Common Weeds of the United States," mentions field sandbur—also known as burgrass (*Cenchrus incertus*), Southern sandbur (*C. echinatus*) and longspine sandbur (*C. longispinus*).

You may be dealing with all three species. However, since you mentioned grass burrs, I believe you are dealing with the field sandbur, or burgrass. Field sandbur is an annual or biennial grassy weed, with spiny burrs. It produces flowers along a spike, with spikelets enclosed in spiny burrs. The burrs produce between one and three straw-purple colored seeds from June to September.

Since the plant can grow close to the ground or upright, short mowing or repeated mowing will not help to manage the problem. Mowing at regular intervals and bagging the clippings might help minimize the problem from a cultural standpoint.

Your best option in managing sandbur is to use herbicides such as Surflan, Snapshot or Acclaim. Repeat applications as needed, but make sure these products are labeled for your particular turfgrass.

## Controlling sprouts on cut stumps

**Problem:** What is the best way to get rid of sprout growth from cut stumps? A number of trees and shrubs produce these sprouts after having been cut. Is there any danger in using chemicals to prevent this growth? (Michigan)

**Solution:** Cut stumps often produce sprouts after the trees or shrubs have been removed.

To prevent this growth, apply herbicides such as Roundup, Garlon or Tordon—either as concentrate or diluted to 50 percent with water mixtures. Soon after cutting the plants, apply directly onto the cambium layer. One application is normally enough.

Utility arborists use either Garlon or Tordon for stumps. Tree care arborists generally use herbicides such as Roundup.

The above herbicides may adversely affect plants of the same species that have a root graft with the treated stump. In these situations, the treatment may not kill the plants grafted to the treated stump, but may cause injury. These treatments may also help manage sucker growth produced from roots.

Rain or overhead irrigation can wash the herbicide from cut stumps, thus reducing its effectiveness. Another caution is that if Tordon or Garlon washes from the application site, it can be absorbed by roots of non-target desirable plants adjacent to treated cut stumps.

Make sure that you are licensed to use these herbicides and have the proper pesticide licensing category to treat cut stumps.

## Try bait products for rodent control

**Problem:** We have had serious problems with mice and voles chewing the bark of low growing (groundcover) juniper plants. We have used chemical baits, with some success. Any other suggestions? (New York)

**Solution:** Rodents present a serious problem in landscapes. They chew the bark of plants at the ground level.

This problem is particularly severe if there is too much mulch around the base of trunks. Rodents, like mice and voles, will be active under thick groundcovers, such as juniper. This problem would be fairly common during winter months.

Using bait would be the most effective and practical method of managing them. Place bait stations where there is the most rodent activity, and check them periodically. Since you have had limited success with bait stations, make sure you are indeed dealing with rodent problems or something else.

Sometimes these problems may be related to slugs and/or snails. Even in this case, bait stations are the best solution.

Another potential cause of the problem is low temperature injury. Junipers, particularly a variety called 'Andora,' are very sensitive to basal bark splitting and bark peeling.

Check and see whether this is the problem. Unfortunately, not much can be done to prevent this. Improve drainage, provide proper mulching and fertilize as needed.

You could also look into the feasibility of trapping these rodents in addition to the baiting method. With all these efforts you should take care of those difficult to control pests.

## Treat dogwood borers in early May

**Problem:** Please give recommendations for controlling borers on dogwoods. (New Jersey)

**Solution:** Wherever dogwoods are being grown, borers are usually a major problem. At least seven kinds of borers can attack dogwoods. The most destructive among these are the flat-headed borer, *Chrysobothris femorata*, and the dogwood borer, *Synanthedon scitula*.

To control these, treat the trunk and lower branches with insecticides, such as Dursban, during early May, and repeat applications three times at three-week intervals. Read the label and follow directions.

Keep the plants under good care by watering and fertilizing as needed to improve vitality.

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*Mail questions to "Ask the Expert," LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT, 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44130. Please allow two to three months for an answer to appear in the magazine.*