

## Flowers in the Yard

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I've noticed that a lot of people like flowers in their "yards", but not in their "lawns." This spring has been an exceptional year for early season yard flowers. The calls that I've been receiving from frustrated homeowners are proof of that. Before I go any further let me just say that any actions you take now to deal with these is going to be of very little real value. To prevent a repeat of this issue next year, will require you to remember to do a few things in October!

Let's start with what plants we are dealing with. The abundant purple flowers are henbit; the yellow is the well known dandelion; little white flowers are chickweed, and the little blue flowers are speedwell. There's others like star of Bethlehem, wild violets, etc. but the big four are henbit, dandelion, chickweed and speedwell. Dandelions are a perennial but we often treat them like an annual. The other three are all classified as winter annuals. They germinate from September though late October or even early November. In the fall they are small easily overlooked plants. In late winter they explode in growth, are full sized and blooming now and will start to die in May as they produce seed and will be gone by late June.

In all honesty, spraying them now is a waste of time. Once they hit full bloom they are going to go ahead and make seed even if you spray them. They are also very hard to kill at this time as they are large mature plants. We have the added issue that the herbicides that will control these also have vapors that on warm days will move with the wind and cause damage to plants like redbuds, roses, walnuts and tomatoes (which shouldn't be planted yet anyway). IF you do spray, make sure that the wind is fairly calm, the temperature is above 50 degrees (so the plants are actively growing), but below 85 degrees so vapor volatilization of the herbicide is less.

All of these plants I've mentioned are present every year. We may not have seen a lot of them last year because fall of 2017 was very dry. A lot of the seed never sprouted. Fall of 2018 was very wet. Additionally, many lawns were stressed by last summer's drought so there were open areas with exposed soil. This leads to a perfect storm of plant growth because nature doesn't like bare soil. Spring was somewhat late in arriving so once it did warm up, these plants exploded in growth very rapidly. The most obvious one right now, henbit (purple flower) is everywhere. I honestly would not try to spray henbit as the results will be frustrating. The herbicides we have available for our lawns are honestly quite weak on henbit and especially on mature henbit.

Remember that weeds aren't the problem, but the symptom of the problem. The problem is that a lawn that is thin or mowed too short will allow too much sun to get to the soil and then these plants, weeds, that we don't want start to move in. The best solution is not herbicides, but lawn management from now through fall that improves the overall health of the lawn. Mowing tall, proper fertilization and water management (if you irrigate) can all help to improve lawn health.

Fall lawn herbicide treatments are far more effective if done properly. You have to use combination herbicides that have 2,4-D, dicamba, MCPP or other herbicides. This would include, but not limited to, products like Trimec, Weed-B-Gon, etc. Straight 2,4-D will not control these weeds. Most weed and feed items are effective BUT September applications are too early as many of the weeds haven't germinated yet. You need to wait until late October to treat to prevent a repeat of this year's purple haze invasion!