

It's NOT too early to think about knotweed January 23, 2017

As I watched rain fall on my ice-covered lawn last Monday, I noticed a few flooded areas developing along the fence line where the family dog frequently travels. This was not by itself disconcerting – trafficked areas covered in ice on frozen soil shouldn't be expected to drain well, but it got me thinking. Prostrate knotweed (*Polygonum aviculare*) commonly occurs on low-oxygen soils such as those that have been heavily trafficked or previously flooded, and I've got both – an apparent Shangri-La for prostrate knotweed. But still, we're talking about a summer annual weed, right? Yes, but prostrate knotweed seed breaks cold dormancy and germinates sooner than other summer annuals, much sooner.

It's estimated that germination begins after seeds warm with soil temperatures ranging from 35-50° F for approximately two months, and ceases after soil temperatures consistently exceed 50° F. During most years in Nebraska, germination likely first occurs between late February and early March, but could occur even sooner. Indeed, we could be as few as 3-4 weeks from prostrate knotweed germination in some areas in Nebraska, and probably less on south-facing slopes that warm more quickly. Preemergence (PRE) herbicides are preferred for prostrate knotweed control, and isoxaben is more effective than those used to control other summer annual weeds (prodiamine, dithiopyr, pendimethalin, etc.). If you were unable to make this application in early winter as is often recommended, look for a time in the next few weeks to apply a PRE. Remember that the application will require irrigation if sufficient rain does not follow soon after treatment – check the label of your chosen product for specifics. For example, isoxaben must be activated with 0.5 inches of rain or irrigation within 21 days of application. Also, keep in mind that overseeding desirable turf species is not recommended until 60 days after application of isoxaben, which is the last week of March if applied today.



Mature prostrate knotweed with small, white flowers at leaf axils.

Postemergence (POST) herbicides may effectively control prostrate knotweed when young, and those containing dicamba or triclopyr are most effective (2,4-D is not the best choice unless mixed with one of these ingredients). However, the slender leaves of prostrate knotweed seedlings resemble those of grasses, making populations difficult to identify until mature. At this time, control is much more difficult with POST herbicides.

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