

Henbit headaches: controlling this pesky winter-annual**April 13, 2016**

There have been many reports of henbit in lawns and landscape beds this spring. It isn't immediately clear why it seems to be widespread in 2016. Maybe the warm weather in early March jumpstarted the growth of this winter annual. In any case, many people have been asking how to control this weed.

First some biology. Henbit (a.k.a. henbit deadnettle) is an annual forb in Nebraska. It is the member of the mint family, which means it will have a square stem. It also has distinctive leaves with crenate and lobed leaf margins and purple to pink flowers. Most importantly for control, this weed is a winter annual. Henbit seed germinates in the fall, and the small plants overwinter before growing aggressively in early spring. It will then flower in April to May and die with the hot and dry summer weather. The flowers can produce a lot of seed, which is one reason henbit infestations can get worse each year.

Control of henbit this time of year is not recommended because the plant will die shortly. The best option for control is to hand pull the weed. This has the advantage of minimizing the amount of seed production for next fall. If the henbit infestations are becoming unacceptable, then apply a PRE in late summer to early fall. Finally, henbit that does germinate in the fall will be killed with the same POST herbicides that are used to control other pesky weeds like dandelions and creeping Charlie. Other management options for henbit control include, 1) maintaining a healthy and vigorously growing lawn or 2) adding a deep layer of mulch to landscape beds.

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