



# NOXIOUS WEEDS

## TO PULL OR NOT TO PULL?

*Did Shakespeare have weed problems?*

Amy Collett

We'd like to do the right thing as responsible land stewards when it comes to controlling pesky noxious weeds.

It's hard deciding whether or not to treat these weeds with herbicide or pull them. We want to ensure we aren't going to make the problem worse before we spend a bunch of time and effort pulling weeds. No one wants to waste their time and increase a weed infestation!

To make this simple: nearly all weeds, noxious or obnoxious, can be treated using herbicides. The importance of contacting your local weed and pest control district can't be emphasized enough for advice on:

- Which herbicide to use,
- Rates to achieve control,
- Time of year to apply.

Remember to always read and understand the label to ensure safe and proper use.

Herbicides are becoming more precise on the plants they control as

well as the range of application sites. Obtaining expert advice and the right product is like sending a laser-guided missile to the heart of the weed infestation. In the big picture, this is great news for controlling weeds while protecting Wyoming native species.

Some folks, however, live for good ol' fashioned physical labor and choose to hand pull their weeds. This can be successful as long as the growing cycle of the species is known and understood. Knowing if the species is an annual, biennial, or a perennial is important; it will help determine if pulling the species will be effective, or if you need to use other methods of control.

### Targeting Annual, Biennial Weeds

Pulling any **annual** or **biennial** plants before they go to seed is an effective control because they generally reproduce only by seed. Annual plants complete life cycles in one year: they germinate, produce flowers, then seed and die all within one year.

There are two types of **annual** plants: **winter annuals** and **summer annuals**. **Winter annuals** will germinate in the fall then go to seed in the spring the following year. Control of winter annuals is ideal in the fall when these plants green up but have not yet gone to seed. **Summer annuals** germinate in the spring or early summer and go to seed soon after. Spring is ideal treatment time for summer annuals.

**Biennial** plants, which can also be physically controlled, complete their life cycles in two years. They form a rosette of leaves the first year to grow the tap root underground, which acts as an energy reserve for the plant. Then, during the second growing season, the tap root can produce a large plant with hundreds of thousands of seeds for reproduction.

A first-year biennial is optimal to pull or treat with herbicide. There is less plant to remove and considerably less herbicide will be used to kill the rosette versus a maturing plant. If all of the rosettes aren't controlled, the

bolting second-year plant can still be controlled prior to flowering. Once an annual or biennial plant flowers, they need to be tied in trash bags so seeds do not spread. If these high seed producers are treated with herbicide after they flower, they can often still produce some viable seeds.

## Perennial Weed Control

**Perennial** plants live for more than two years and most often cannot be controlled due to their extensive root systems. The visible portion of the plant appears to die off in the fall only to grow back from nutrients stored in their roots in the spring. These weeds can reproduce through their root system or by seed.

Often, disturbing the stems or roots of this plant can actually stimulate growth and spread. The best time and method to treat this subset of weeds is with herbicide in the spring and early summer when the plant is actively growing to prohibit flowering and again in the fall after the first hard frost if plants are still green. The frost stimulates the perennials to go into hibernation mode, taking all of their energy into the root system for the winter. This is the perfect time to treat perennials with herbicide since the downward movement of nutrients will also get the herbicide to where it needs to go to kill off the root system.

Spraying these plants is not the only way to get rid of them. Using an integrated approach against these weeds can help control them.

## Integrating Approaches

**Integrated weed management** uses multiple control techniques to

## WHAT WEED

See this University of Wyoming Extension website <http://bit.ly/wyoweeds> to help identify the weed and weed type that's caught your attention.

gain a synergistic impact on targeted species – with better results than the use of any single control technique.

These control methods include **physical, chemical, biological,** and **cultural** control.

**Physical** control can be mowing, chopping, pulling, cutting, burning,

tilling, as well as utilizing physical barriers. If hand pulling weeds, always be sure to wear gloves and long sleeves to protect your skin from plant irritants.

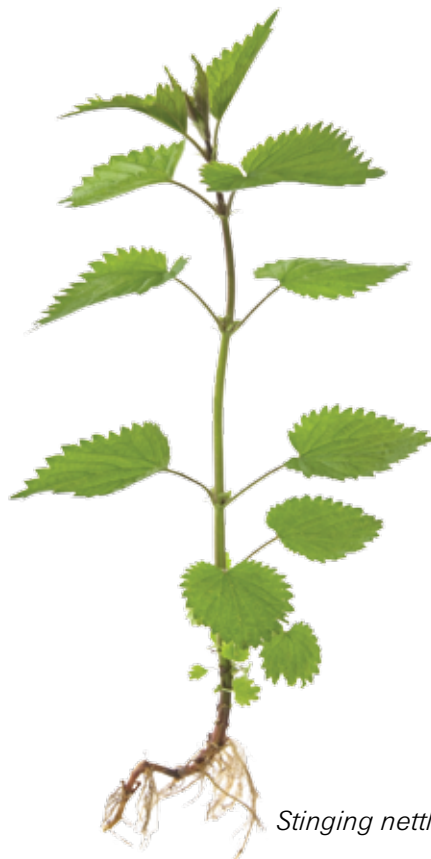
**Chemical** control is the use of herbicides to control weeds. This is often the most effective control technique and, if used correctly, can greatly reduce infestations. See page 25 to help prevent herbicide resistance

**Biological** control is the use of introduced competition or predation. Often, introduced noxious weeds are problems because they have been removed from their natural enemies. Biological control includes introducing insects, predators, and pathogens to control weeds as well as the use of targeted grazing.

**Cultural** control is identified as modifying a person's behaviors to prevent noxious weeds from being introduced and includes education, prevention, early detection of new invasions, modifying grazing habits, replanting disturbed or previously infested areas with native or desirable species, and monitoring successes and failures.

For help creating an integrated weed management plan, please call your local weed and pest control district. Please visit <http://www.wyoweed.org/about/district-offices> to find the phone number of the district in your county. Offices are ready and willing to answer your toughest questions.

Did you know that pulling weeds is a stress reducer? Just one more reason to spend time outdoors in our great state!



*Stinging nettle*

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