

Weeds- A Pesky Problem

By: Katie M. Ralls

Summer is a beautiful time in Central Oregon. However; the warm weather, freshly planted flowers, gardens and green lawns comes with pesky problems, including weeds. Weeds are broadly defined as a plant growing where it is unwanted. Weeds don't just cause problem in lawns and gardens; they are also a major problem in rangelands, recreation areas and forested regions. The best path to controlling noxious weeds is to first correctly identify the weed(s) you have.

One weed that has already flowered and developed seed in Central Oregon is bur buttercup, or curvedseed butterwort (*Ceratocephala testiculata*). It is very small, normally only one to two inches tall, but can grow up to four inches tall. Its flowers are a small, dull yellow, with hairy leaves appearing somewhat divided. This small buttercup produces a cluster of hard, spiny fruits, called "burs." Like other members of the buttercup family, they are poisonous. If they are found in large numbers, it is usually a sign of excessive disturbance to the land. If you have recently disturbed property, keep your eyes open. Favorite sites include gardens, back yards and along roadways. If you find bur buttercup with the bur already intact, you are probably too late to use herbicides, the best course of action is to clean up the area by hoeing and burning the plants.

Another small yellow flower to be looking for is puncturevine (*Tribulus terrestris*). Puncturevine is a summer weed that blooms from July to October. This weed is very drought tolerant and survives well in sandy or gravelly soils. It grows horizontal to the ground from a taproot, and forms dense mats from the center that can easily reach four feet in diameter and produces numerous stems, which can grow up to six feet long. Leaves grow opposite of each other and are divided into four to eight pair of leaflets, each about a half inch long. Flowers are small, approximately half an inch wide, with five petals and are yellow. Puncturevine also produces a woody bur consisting of five sections which, at maturity, break into tack-like structures with sharp rigid spines. A single plant can produce up to 400 burs, each containing two or three seeds. Due to its size and number of seeds, it is easily spread by animals, humans, and vehicles. This vine infests pastures, fields, ditches, and roadsides. Puncturevine seeds are very painful when stepped on, and can easily puncture bicycle tires and street shoes. This weed can also injure the feet, hides, mouths, eyes, and digestive tracts of livestock and may contain levels of nitrate, toxic enough to poison livestock.

After you properly identify which weed(s) is present, you can determine the best method of control and prevention. Seedlings emerge during the growing season as long as water is available. In puncturevine and buttercup bur, if green burs carrying seed are present plants should be disposed of preferably by burning. When caught early, either of these plants can be easily controlled by hoeing, shallow tillage, or by using the appropriate herbicide. Once these weeds are established, they are difficult to eradicate. Prior to application of herbicides, you should always consult the label for approved use for specific crops and sites.

If you are unable to properly identify a weed, need to know how to get rid of a specific weed or have any other weed related questions, please feel free to contact the Master Gardeners or a staff member at the Central Oregon Agricultural Research Center at 541.475.7107.