



BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

1500 Hwy 2, Suite 101 • Sandpoint, ID 83864 • Phone: (208) 255-5681ext.6
<http://bonnercounty.us/noxious-weeds>

Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl

With everything around the yard and property being put to bed for the winter, your lawn should be on that list. Turf weeds can be treated throughout the fall, and in conjunction with a fertilizer application, a less than stellar lawn can look good as new in the spring. I have seen neglected lawns that were so overwhelmed with weeds it was difficult to detect much of a stand of turf grass. I have also seen those lawns treated with herbicides and fertilizer in the fall then observed a weed free lawn the following spring, with turf grass coming through that you wouldn't have known existed looking at it the previous year!

Sticking with the theme of turf weeds, weed of the month for November is Buckhorn Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*). It is a native of Europe, but is not listed as a noxious weed in Idaho—it generally does not create much of a problem in areas other than turf and landscapes. Buckhorn Plantain is an herbaceous perennial with a fibrous root system and narrow-elliptic leaves that form a basal cluster. Several stems emerge from the basal leaves and develop dense spikes of small white flowers; flowering takes place during the summer months. The stems are fast growing, and in lawns they re-grow at a quicker pace than the grass [particularly from mid-summer through the rest of the season when conditions are drier]...I should point out that these stems are technically not stems, but flowering stalks. Said flowering stalks can reach about 18 inches in height when left unmanaged, however they usually reach 4-6 inches in turf situations where mowing at typical intervals takes place. A lawn full of Buckhorn Plantain can look awkward with a stand full of stems that need to be mowed but grass that is still at a desirable height.

Aside from turf and landscape beds, Buckhorn Plantain can also be found in gardens, driveways, pastures and orchards. Being a perennial it spreads by seeds and roots, and is another one of those opportunist weeds that takes advantage of areas that have been disturbed or are poorly maintained. Cultural control is effective; with a fertilizer regimen throughout the year along with regular watering during the dry months, the healthy turf grass will be very competitive against the plantains. Fertilize three times per year, minimum. Use a high nitrogen blend in the spring as soon as the snow has melted off, then a 'triple 16' blend during the growing season, followed by a slow release nitrogen/high potassium blend in the fall. The three numbers on a fertilizer bag indicate the amount of each primary element—the first number is the amount of nitrogen, the second number is the amount of phosphorus and the third number is the amount of potassium. For example, if the label reads 26-2-11, it contains 26% nitrogen, 2% phosphorus and 11% potassium. Nitrogen gives you rapid growth and that deep green color, where phosphorus and potassium promote stem development and root strengthening, respectively. Any fertilizer product that reads "Winterizer Lawn Fertilizer" contains the blend of a slow release nitrogen along with a higher rate of potassium, which is what you want to apply right now.



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These guidelines apply for control of many turf weeds, not just Buckhorn Plantain. Mechanical control of Buckhorn Plantain is not effective in turf unless it exists in very sparse quantities—if that is the case use a screwdriver to remove each plant, roots and all. It can be controlled by tillage in space between garden rows, orchards, etc. Herbicide control is effective; Trimec Classic® (2,4-D + Dicamba) or Crossbow® (2,4-D ester + Triclopyr) applied in the fall with a backpack sprayer or hand pump sprayer on a smaller lawn, or boom sprayed if the area is larger, is the ideal attack for an herbicide treatment. Consult label for exact rates, there is a breakdown of ounces per gallon of solution to mix for hand held spray equipment. Any 2,4-D product [or any broadleaf weed killer found in lawn and garden sections of hardware or department stores] will work for spot spraying in the spring and summer. A two pronged approach of combining cultural control and herbicide control by way of a concurrent fertilizer and herbicide treatment in the fall will provide the best results on turf weeds, especially with what we have in the spotlight today, Buckhorn Plantain. Lawn maintenance in the month of November may not sound too appealing to most, but the effort will pay off when spring emerges and you have a lawn that your neighbors will be jealous of!