

WINNING THE WEED WAR!
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Got weeds? Why are you standing in your food plot looking at an ugly patch of weeds choking out your favorite plants? Is this what the seed dealer, the county extension agent, or the wildlife biologist forgot to tell you about?

Weed control is a complex subject which varies from one piece of ground to another, depending upon the seed species or root systems already in the soil, the last time it was plowed and the weather. There are hundreds of species of weeds, both annual and perennial, waiting to jump on your planting and take advantage of all that money you spent on seed, lime and fertilizer!

In late winter and spring, you could be dealing with both categories of food plots - a cool season planting of clover, alfalfa, or trefoil which is now being invaded by grasses or a warm season planting, planted in April, May or June with corn, grain sorghum, or warm season legumes. Each has its own set of problems and remedies we'll discuss later.

Lets go through a few question and answers to simplify a complex problem and help us win the weed wars:
Is it a broadleaf or a grass? What species is it? If you can't identify the weed, bring a sample to your Agricultural Extension Agent, University agronomy department, or even a nearby farmer. Weed lists are long. Here is a short list of some of the common

worst offenders by category. Broadleaf weeds include pigweed, ragweed, horsenettle, thistle, jimsonweed, morning glory, milkweed, coffeeweed. Grasses include fescue, bermudagrass, johnsongrass, crabgrass, foxtail, and many others.

What do I do next? In some respects, if you are standing in the weeds in June wondering what to do, it's too late for some of the best tactics. What weeds invaded this plot last year? Chances are it's the same species that you are looking at now. In other words with good planning, if you have had past weed problems from the grass family, you should have planted a broadleaf such as clover, jointvetch or peas. Vice versa, plant a grass such as grain sorghum if your weed problem is broadleaf. This system allows for specific selective weed control using herbicides. In other words, you can selectively get rid of your weeds by spraying without killing your target planting.

Of all the options (mowing, shading or herbicides), chemical herbicides are often the best choice for your food plot. They are safe, effective, inexpensive, and cut manpower and plowing tremendously. How do I get started with chemicals? Obviously, you have to have some spraying equipment. Often, by using a garden-type two or three gallon sprayer, you will quickly find yourself "under-gunned" in your weed war. Backpack sprayers work better but if you are serious about food plots, you will need an electric or PTO driven spray rig for a 4-wheeler or tractor. Boom type sprayers are usually better than rainbow type sprayers. Sprayers range in price from \$100 to \$1,500, depending on

features.

What herbicide do I use? There are hundreds on the market. For purposes of this article, we'll concentrate on three - Roundup (41% glyphosate), Poast Plus and 2,4-D. Glyphosate kills everything. It's best use is prior to use of a grain drill or disk harrow. With Glyphosate and a no-till grain drill, you can just about park your disk harrows or plows. In late winter/early spring, spray Glyphosate and drill clover, trefoil or oats. If no drill is available, spray, wait two weeks and plow and plant. Roundup can also be used as a spot spray for isolated invading weed clumps like fescue or thistle.

Poast Plus is a grass selective herbicide (with pre-mixed ammonium sulfate) that basically kills all grasses but no broadleaves. To be effective, you must mix **crop oil** with Poast Plus. So, if we are standing in our food plot in May and the plot is a broadleaved perennial like alfalfa, white clover, or trefoil being invaded with crabgrass, or fescue, then Poast Plus is our weapon. Even new spring annual broadleaf plantings of peas, beans, clover, or jointvetch are candidates for Poast Plus. This is where last year's planning pays off. If this plot had grass problems last year, plow repeatedly and plant a broadleaf. When the noxious grass re-emerges, spray with Poast Plus for the knockout punch. Whichever scenario, if the noxious grasses are over eight inches tall, mow, wait a couple of weeks and then spray the regrowth.

2,4-D is a broadleaf killer that has been around under many brand

names for many years. It will not kill grasses. Grain sorghum or corn infested with coffeeweed, ragweed, jimsonweed, morning glory or any other broadleaf qualifies for 2,4-D application. Grain sorghum is a little sensitive to 2,4-D, so read the label carefully. 2,4-D, Poast Plus, and Glyphosate are all available over the counter with no pesticide license required.

Read The Label! This cannot be emphasized enough. Do not apply any more chemical than the label directs! Use at least 15 to 20 gallons of water per acre for best coverage and effective kills. Effectiveness of Glyphosate and 2,4-D can often be increased by mixing with surfactants (spreader/stickers). Do not mix two herbicides together unless it specifically allows this on the label. Carefully calibrate your spraying equipment (your agriculture extension service can help with this) and carefully measure your food plot acreage. I have seen many eyeballed one-acre plots that were really only one half-acre thus doubling fertilizer, seed rates, herbicide and everything. It's a good way to waste money and reduce efficiency.

Weeds are most vulnerable to herbicides when they are vigorously growing or young tender seedlings. Do not spray when plants are wet or when rain is expected within 24 hours. Do not spray when it is windy, drift may be harmful to the applicator and kill surrounding plants. Do not spray during an extended drought, weed control is ineffective and valuable crop species may be injured or killed.

In summary, herbicides are a safe, effective tool to manage deer

food plots. Once equipment is available, effective chemical applications can be made for \$15 to \$50 per acre. Counting equipment and manpower costs, you cannot plow any cheaper than this and every time you plow, you will germinate a new crop of weed seeds to compete with your favorite deer plants. The best of all worlds would be herbicides followed by no-till drilling. Fewer weeds are germinated, soil erosion is greatly reduced, and seed placement is precise. Drilled plots can even be treated selectively with herbicide later as needed for final control. By using chemicals, we have maintained vigorous ladino clover stands for five to ten years without replanting. You too can win the weed wars by careful planning and judicious use of chemicals for weed control. The results will surprise you.

Herbicide	Target Species	Surfactant Needed (spreader-sticker)
Glyphosate (many brand names)	all emerged plants	sometimes (see label)
Poast Plus	all grasses	crop oil
2,4-D (many brand names)	all broadleaves	sometimes (see label)