How to take the ‘bur’ out of sandbur

By ROBERT FEARS

THERE is new help available to those who live in sandbur country. Coastal sandbur (Cenchrus spinus) is an undesirable grass species that spans the southern U.S. from coast to coast and is found as far north as Kansas and Virginia.

This troublesome plant is also known as field sandbur, grassbur or simply sandbur. Botanists changed the name, and in some literature it may still be called by its old scientific name, Cenchrus echinatus.

Sandbur is a problem in pastures and hay fields because it reduces forage quantities and qualities, and sometimes because it can injure the mouths of livestock. “Cattle often graze young sandbur plants,” says Paul Baumann of Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension Service.

“During late stages of seed production, however, capsules, or burs, are produced that penetrate tissue in and around the cow’s mouth, causing pain and sometimes infection.”

These capsules make the sandbur plant more drought tolerant than other grass species in dry, sandy soils, Baumann says. The burs soak up soil moisture and hold it until the seeds receive other germination stimulants such as warm temperature, sufficient light and correct day length.

Sandburs are less of a problem if forage managers maintain dense grass populations with proper fertilization, and also if they graze or hay in a manner that leaves enough leaf material for forage re-establishment, Baumann says.

New control available

In years gone by, some forage producers used MSMA successfully to control sandbur post-emergence. However, all major manufacturers of MSMA voluntarily withdrew their registrations because of the lack of meat and milk tolerances and cancellation of other registrations.

Prowl H2O is the only preemergence herbicide registered for sandbur control on grazed pastures and hay fields. Atrazine can be used on Conservation Reserve Program lands, but not on grazing lands. There is a 45-day waiting period after treatment before cattle that have grazed treated forage can be sold for slaughter. To be effective, 1 inch of rain or irrigation has to occur within a few hours after treatment.

The new fighter in the ring showed up last year when DuPont Crop Protection introduced Pastora herbicide for post-emergence treatment of sandburs in bermudagrass pastures. Pastora also provides good control of several other grasses and broadleaf weeds in bermudagrass (see story at left).

Active ingredients in Pastora are nicosulfuron and metsulfuron methyl, and the product is formulated as a dry, flowable material. Pastora is registered for use in bermudagrass pastures and hay fields and has no haying, grazing or feeding restrictions. It is not a restricted-use product.

Timing is critical with this herbicide for sandbur control.

“The most important consideration for sandbur control with Pastora is recognition of grassburs early growth stages,” Baumann explains. “Sandburs should be sprayed with Pastora when they are less than 2 inches tall.”

Young seedlings can be recognized by their usual hairless leaves, Baumann says.

Sheaths surrounding the stem may have hairs along their margins and will generally become pubescent (with hairs) as the plant matures. Stems are somewhat flattened and often purplish-colored at the base. Tillers develop early in plant growth, which adds to the weed’s competitiveness.

“When you are doubtful about identification, dig seedling plants and you will often find the bur attached in the root area,” Baumann adds.

Craig Alford of DuPont says for sandbur control, apply Pastora at 1 to 1.5 ounces per acre as a broadcast spray, either through ground equipment or by air.

He says 20 gallons per acre of total spray solution are recommended for ground applications and 5 gallons per acre for aerial treatments. A non-ionic surfactant or a crop oil concentrate must be used in the spray mix to obtain good results.

“Applications of Pastora may result in temporary yellowing or stunting of bermudagrass, but this response will more likely occur if the grass is stressed from adverse environmental conditions such as extreme temperatures or moisture, abnormal soil conditions, or cultural practices,” Alford says.

Yellowing and stunting is minimized by treating when bermudagrass has less than 2 inches of new growth during initial green-up, or by treating within seven days after hay cutting, he says.

Fears owns RJ Consultant Services and writes from Georgetown, Texas.

Bonus: Pastora has other uses

In addition to grassbur, Pastora controls grasses such as johnsongrass, Italian ryegrass, perennial ryegrass, Pensacola bahiagrass and crabgrass. It also controls broadleaf weeds such as henbit.

Broadleaf weed control with Pastora is through preemergence as well as postemergence activity, and grass control occurs only from a post-emergence treatment.

“Pastora is effectively applied in late winter or early spring for winter weed control while bermudagrass is dormant,” says Craig Alford of DuPont. “Often Pastora is mixed in liquid fertilizer for this application. The combined fertilization and weed control treatments cause earlier green-up and faster growth of bermuda, often resulting in an extra cutting of hay.”

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