

Hit winter weeds with fall application

By CECIL H. YANCY JR.

AN early corn and soybean harvest has put a wrinkle in weed control after harvest, but it's still important to consider fall application of herbicides to start clean next spring.

Frank Carey, Valent technical service representative, says an early harvest presents plenty of challenges to weed control.

"Fighting pigweeds, marestail, ryegrass and other weeds between now and frost is a whole different scenario," Carey says. The challenge is twofold:

- Pigweeds have been biding their time under the canopy of corn and soybeans. After harvest, they'll take off with sunlight and can establish new problems. "Even though you've had good pigweed control up until harvest, you'll have a new crop after harvest," Carey says.

- Because harvest came in August and September this year, typically two of the drier months of the year, soil-applied residuals won't take effect unless farmers have irrigation to activate them. In that case, Carey recommends using Gramoxone or shredding the stalks or plants into the ground. "There are a lot of questions and few answers for after-harvest weed control this season," Carey says.

Despite the early harvest, fall applica-

Key Points

- Applying herbicide in the fall is an important practice for weed control.
- Early harvest, however, puts a wrinkle in weed control.
- Apply fall herbicides between Oct. 15 and Nov. 15.

tion of herbicides continues to be important for October and November.

"I like to apply fall residuals after Halloween," Carey says. "If you can get out a fall application after Halloween, that's going to last until mid- to late March. The farther south you are, the application time shifts toward Christmas; the farther north, you can go earlier into October."

Fall application has become a popular practice in the past five years or so as farmers seek to eliminate fields of glyphosate-resistant weeds prior to the start of the next season. Many weeds in Southern fields have long germination periods, especially pigweed and marestail.

Valent is promoting the practice through a campaign called "Open Season on Winter Weeds" and the use of Valor and Valor XLT, residuals that are part of Monsanto's Roundup Ready PLUS Weed Management Solutions.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LARRY STECKEL, UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

AVOID THIS: Fall application of herbicide is one way to start with a clean field for the next year. In this field, glyphosate-resistant marestail has gotten out of hand.

"Fall application kills the weeds when they are little and lessens the workload of waiting until spring, when uncertain weather patterns may keep farmers out of the fields at critical times before planting," Carey says. "Having clean fields over winter means those weeds aren't using up the fertilizer that you put out in the fall."

When applying a residual in the fall,

keep in mind planting intervals. While some herbicides are very effective, they also can have plant-back restrictions.

"Even the best-laid crop plans can change unexpectedly at the last minute," Carey says. "Fall application should be designed to work well with a number of possible crops. Crop rotation is dependent on the herbicide applied."

Sunn hemp: the powerhouse cover crop

By BRAD HAIRE

ITS limited seed availability poses a problem for Southern growers, but sunn hemp appears to be a powerhouse of a cover crop, or at the very least a novel thing to grow. And it ain't marijuana; it just looks a bit like it and grows high really fast.

Sunn hemp is a tropical legume that can grow nearly a foot a week, even in bad soil.

"Sunn hemp is a good nitrogen source, and anytime we can use a legume and get free nitrogen, it's a benefit," says Kip Balkcom, a research agronomist with USDA in Alabama.

The seed is expensive compared to other cover crops, but it brings a lot to the field and could find a workable place in Southeast crop rotations.

"The one thing is, it is a very quick-growing plant," Balkcom says. He says sunn hemp could work well in an Alabama rotation following corn harvest and planted in early August. This would give the plant six weeks to grow before frost kills it, but more than enough time for it to produce a good nitrogen boost in early fall for winter wheat planted behind it.

Richard Petcher has championed sunn hemp for many years. The former Alabama Extension agent now owns Petcher Seed, which sells sunn hemp.

"It is used in many countries, but [is] fairly new to the U.S. In 2012 there were approximately 22,000 acres planted in the U.S., with half of these acres in the Southeast," Petcher notes.

Within 60 days of planting, Petcher says, sunn hemp can reach 6 feet

Key Points

- Sunn hemp is commonly used as a cover crop in countries outside the U.S.
- Within 60 days, it can reach 6 feet tall and create 4 tons of organic matter per acre.
- Seed supplies are limited, but 22,000 acres were planted in the U.S. last year.

tall, produce 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre, translocate 10 pounds of phosphorus and 80 pounds of potash, and create 4 tons of organic matter. It smothers out most weeds and produces a toxin that knocks out Palmer amaranth.

Petcher sells a 50-pound bag for \$150. He has smaller bags, too, for those who want to experiment with it. But the seed supplies are limited now, mainly

until a variety can be bred that will seed well in the Southeast.

Petcher recommends 15 pounds of seed per acre planted one-half inch deep or drilled in. It'll grow on soil with pH from 5 to 8, he says. Sunn hemp is very drought-tolerant. It is day-length-sensitive and will die when temperatures drop to 28 degrees F.

And deer, he notes, love it.



SEE IT GROW: The tall sunn hemp on the right was planted June 13 at the Wiregrass Research and Extension Center in Headland, Ala. The short sunn hemp was planted July 13. The photo was taken July 25. It grows fast.