

Lawn Burweed is a Sticky Problem

Larry Williams
UF/IFAS Extension Agent
Okaloosa County
lwilliams@co.okaloosa.fl.us

Lawn burweed is a winter annual weed that becomes problematic in spring. It is a low-growing weed with leaves somewhat resembling a miniature version of parsley.



Close up of parsley-like leaves. Note sharp spines in leaf axils.

Photo Credits: Weeds of Southern Turfgrasses

Burweed seeds germinate in fall. The plant remains small and inconspicuous during the winter. It's not until temperatures warm in spring that this innocent-looking and often unnoticed weed begins to rapidly grow, forming spine-tipped burs in its leaf axils. These sharp, spiny burs hurt as children begin to use the yard again, running around barefoot on a nice early spring day. Even the dog playing fetch suddenly starts doing a painful dance as it finds its way into a prickly patch of burweed. This weed can make a lawn area completely useless until it dies away and decomposes in late spring or early summer, only to reappear from left behind seeds next winter. Individual plants can form a mat spreading to a foot or more in diameter.



Sharp spines can be found in the leaf axils. *Photo Credits: Joseph M. DiTomaso, University of California - Davis, Bugwood.org*

Burweed can easily be controlled during the winter months before the spiny burs become a problem and seeds are produced. But if you wait, you'll have to put up with the pain and inconvenience until the burs again wither away.



Lawn Burweed *Photo Credits: John D. Byrd, Mississippi State University, Bugwood.org*

December, January and February are ideal months to apply a herbicide for the control of burweed. Look for lawn herbicides containing atrazine, 2,4-D or dicamba. Centipedegrass and St. Augustinegrass have excellent tolerance of atrazine. Although labeled for use on most of our permanent lawn species, 2,4-D has been known to cause injury to St. Augustinegrass, especially during periods of hot weather. Use lower rates of dicamba on centipede and St. Augustinegrass. Do not use these herbicides (especially dicamba) within the root zone of desirable plants. **Always follow label instructions and precautions.**

The key factor to effectively controlling lawn burweed is to apply an appropriate herbicide during the winter months.