

SPRING SHOULD BE GREEN, NOT YELLOW

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One of the most common questions I get about pastures is how to control weeds. That begins a discussion about which specific weed is in question. There are summer weeds that need to be sprayed during June and July, while there are cool-season weeds that need to be sprayed during the winter. One of the most common weeds we see across the state is yellow buttercup. Driving across the state in May can be quite colorful, with many pastures solid yellow with blooming buttercup. While this might be pretty, it doesn't make for a productive pasture.

Yellow buttercup, like many other weeds, is detrimental because it reduces the yield from a pasture or hayfield. It uses nutrients that should be for the grass and clover. It also decreases the nutrient content and palatability of a field.

Although buttercup is damaging to a farm's forage production, it is an easily controlled weed. Now is the time to start planning for buttercup control. Paying attention to the following details can help you obtain excellent control of yellow buttercup on your farm.

1. When should I spray? You need to spray before the buttercup blooms. This is normally anytime between late November and early April. You need to wait to spray until daytime temperatures reach 60 degrees for a few days.

2. What should I spray? The ester formulation of 2,4-D is very effective in buttercup control. There are several brand names for this chemical, so read the label to make sure you are getting the right herbicide.

3. How much should I spray? For buttercup control, apply 1 quart per acre of 2, 4-D. If you have buckhorn or broadleaf plantain, increase the rate to 2 quarts per acre. Apply the chemical in 20-25 gallons of water per acre. It is important that the label is read carefully, and all instructions are followed, including avoiding drift to sensitive crops and waiting periods for hay cutting.

4. Will this kill my clover? The 1 quart rate of 2,4-D will not kill established white clover, but it will kill red clover. Higher rates will kill all clover.

Remember that herbicides are just one step in a forage weed control program. Fertilizing and liming according to soil test, and good grazing management will also help reduce the impact of weeds on a pasture. Following these recommendations will help you have beautiful green pastures this spring. Yellow flowers belong in the flower bed, not the pasture.