

Ask a Master Gardener
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Lawn Burweed

Q. There is something in my yard that is sticking and hurting my children and me when we walk barefoot in the grass. What can it be?

A. Walking barefoot in the yard is a rite of spring in our southern culture. Nothing feels as good as the cool grass beneath bare feet. But sharp prickles can take that joy away. It's just not fair, is it? More than likely what you have in your yard is lawn burweed. This weed goes by several names: burweed, spurweed, stickerweed, lawnsbur, sandbur and several others. Lawn burweed germinates from seed in the early fall as temperatures cool and it grows during the winter, inconspicuously, when your grass is dormant. When temperatures begin to rise in the spring the weed grows quickly. This happens about the time spring sports and "barefooting" activities begin so children begin to complain of getting stuck!

The spurs on lawn burweed are not large but plenty painful once the weed forms spine tipped burs in the leaf axils. The plant is fluffy looking with many leaf segments and grows in patches around two to four inches wide and two inches high.

According to Tim R. Murphy, Extension Weed Scientist at the University of Georgia, burweed is easily controlled during the winter. December, January and February are the ideal months to apply herbicides to control or kill this weed. When you notice lawn burweed in April and May it is more difficult to control because your turf grass is no longer dormant and can be harmed by some of the herbicides used to control it. Lawn burweed begins to die when temperatures reach about 90 degrees. Even after the plants die the spiny burs continue to be a problem. Until they completely decompose they can continue to prick children or adults walking or rolling in the grass.

If you are planning to control this weed, a two prong approach may be helpful. First, apply a preemergent herbicide and weed preventer in the fall to kill the seeds as they begin to germinate. Early application is critical. Apply the preemergent herbicide in early October carefully following label directions. Next, look over your lawn in December, January and February to see if any weeds managed to get by the preemergent. If you see them, spray the lawn with a post emergent herbicide safe for your type grass. Again, read the labels of the herbicide carefully.

In dense, well-kept lawns sandburs are not generally a problem. Therefore maintaining your turf grass properly by liming according to a soil test, mowing at the proper height and on a regular basis, and irrigating properly can eliminate this pest and allow you and others to walk barefoot in the yard once more.

For questions about lawn burweed and other gardening topics contact a Master Gardener volunteer at 770-836-8546, via email at ccmg@uga.edu or visit the UGA Extension office at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton.