

Weekly Ag Report

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Good Morning. My name is Cheryl and I am from the Lassen County Agriculture Department. Those rains yesterday sure were refreshing and a welcome change after the July heat. They definitely will start things growing around here, including weeds. Every spring and summer, the Lassen County Agriculture Department receives numerous phone calls about the dreaded puncture vine whose alias is "goat head." Native to southern Europe, it can grow under a wide range of conditions, but its success is likely due to its ability to thrive in hot and dry conditions where other plants cannot.

As most of you know, it can be a major problem just about anywhere, especially along roadsides and ditch banks. Although it is known to be toxic to sheep, its main weedy characteristic is its spiky seedpods which can be very painful when encountered by you or your pet, and are the common culprit of punctured bicycle tires. The seed has four projecting spikes, so arranged, that when three of the spikes are on the ground, the fourth points upward so it can readily attach itself to whatever it pokes into and thus gets spread.

A typical puncture vine plant will produce 200 to 5,000 seeds during one growing season, depending on available soil moisture and other environmental factors. Its long tap root enables it to pull moisture up from the very dry soils, to survive.

As might be expected, it is not recommended to graze livestock in areas infested with puncture vine. Not only can the seed burr injure the mouth, digestive tract and feet of animals, but, it can be toxic to sheep and may contribute to nitrate poisoning in both sheep and cattle.

The primary method of managing puncture vine in the home landscape or garden is removal by hand weeding or hoeing. Mulches can be effective as long as they are at least 3 inches thick and dense enough to block out all light. Biological control from two introduced weevils is also very effective, but there may be a resurgence every few years as the number of the weevils decline along with the population of the goat head.

There are numerous selective broadleaf herbicides for controlling puncture vine. The real problem with managing this persistent weed is that you must keep after the multiple flushes that occur throughout the growing season. Phenoxy herbicides containing Dicamba and 2,4-D are effective management tools for existing mats of these weeds. For residual, season long control, chemicals from the sulfonylurea class of herbicides provides optimum control. As with all herbicide applications, please read and follow label directions!

Finally, don't forget to get your tickets to the 5th Annual Blues and Brews Festival. Enjoy live music, a BBQ and brews from a variety of local breweries. It is this Saturday, the 9th at Every Blooming Thing. Proceeds will be used to fund local youth scholarships.