

Weekly Ag Report
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Good Morning. It's Cheryl Lauritsen again from the Lassen County Agriculture Commissioner's office with this week's Ag Report. Today I want to refresh your memory about puncture vine, otherwise known as goat heads. Every spring and summer, our office receives numerous phone calls about this dreaded weed which is 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. Since we had such a mild winter, puncture vine reared its ugly head earlier than normal this year and the recent rains, though a welcome treat, have enabled this weed to sprout over and over again keeping us all very busy.

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. These little devils are just waiting to provoke pain in anyone or thing that encounters it, and they are brutal on 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. With its extremely protective layer, this seed can last up to 20 years under the right condition. For most of us we are realistically dealing with seed that will last 2 to 3 years in the ground.

The plant's long tap root enables it to pull moisture up from the very dry soils, to survive. It will continue to grow and produce seed until either you or the first freeze stops it. Spraying while still in the early stages is the most effective way to get ride of this pest. If seeds are already present, hand pulling is the best method. Be sure not to shake the seed loose and, if possible, pick up any seed that has already dropped from the plant. A propane weed burner can be an effective way of disposing of seeds left on the ground, but be sure to use care to prevent an accidental fire. Dispose of plants in the trash or burn pile.

Puncture vine does not compete well so the use of competitive plantings may be helpful. Mulches can be effective as long as they are at least 3 inches thick and dense enough to block out all light. Biological control by introducing weevils is also very effective, but once the seeds are gone the number of weevils decline as their food source has been used up.

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.

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. Pre-emergent products

containing oryzalin, benefin, or trifluralin will provide partial control of germinating seeds. These must be applied in late winter or mid-spring prior to germination. As with all herbicide applications, please read and follow label directions!

Finally, don't forget to get your tickets to the 6th annual Blues and Brews Festival. Enjoy live music, a BBQ, and brews from a variety of local breweries. It is this Saturday, August 8th at Every Blooming Thing. Proceeds will be used to fund local youth scholarships.