

2023 Austin, Colorado, Fayette, and Washington Counties Small Acreage Landowner Program – “Weed and Brush Identification”

Why is plant identification important to us as students, land stewards and managers? Consider these answers below but think about why you believe that plant identification is important.

- 1. To name plants and determine the plant composition that will assist in determining range health and the direction that human management is taking the land, thus a tool of seeing change.**
- 2. To determine which species of plants in a pasture can be considered as forage plants for livestock/wildlife.**
- 3. To determine if our rangelands are becoming dominated by noxious and/or invasive plant species and to aid us in finding what measures are available for the management of unwanted plants.**
- 4. To determine if potentially poisonous plants are present that could create a livestock health problem.**
- 5. To determine the proper kind and class of animals to manage on our rangelands as this decision by the landowner is determined by the kinds of plant growing in the pasture. Cattle consume an average of 85% of their diet as grass and is their first preferred food. Sheep have their first dietary preference for forbs which includes weeds. Goats prefer woody plants. Deer diet preference is more similar to sheep where whitetail deer only consume about 9% of their annual diet as grass. Deer prefer forbs.**
- 6. To determine when a particular pasture should be grazed from knowing the predominant kinds of plants growing there and these plants are cool season or warm season.**
- 7. To understand which species of plants to observe for determining when to “graze” or “rest” a pasture.**
- 8. Knowing the plants growing on a property can be of value in ascertaining if the land has productive potential in a financial realm (livestock enterprises, wildlife, etc).**
- 9. Being able to identify the plants growing on your land can help determine if your land is affected by the Endangered Species Act or other government laws and programs.**
- 10. Using the plant community to determine where your land is in respect to the original or pristine plant community, or has it changed and in what direction?**

In a poem written by the great Senator John J. Ingalls titled THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF GRASS, he stated, “Next to the importance to the divine profusion of water, light and

air, those three physical facts which render existence possible, may be reckoned the universal beneficence of grass.“

We find in life that if I look at a plant and I cannot name it, then I cannot see it. It is just green, yellow, purple, black, red or orange. Until I can name the plant, I am not able to look the name up in a book or on the internet to find out the value of the plant from things that others have written down. If I cannot name the plant, then I may have to learn about it through experience.

Being a Landowner

You either bought, inherited, lease or rent the land you are on today. If you purchased the land, did the realtor give you a book of notes and set of pictures (1847) on everything that had been done on the land? You are now managing land that 15 to 50 previous owners and managers determined and made decisions to reach their goal of landownership. Did they do it right? Or was the land you now have already showing signs of past human decisions, good or bad, right or wrong. The previous managers, the American Indians, failed to give us the “book”, a writing of instructions for living happily ever-after here in a semi-arid land.

The brush/weeds growing and doing well on your property right now, represent the unwanted species your past management decisions and selection of tools have not controlled or solved the issue. What are the steps you take to make correct decisions as related to plant issues on your land and pastures in this era of time?

Step One – Get the weeds and brush you have, correctly identified.

Step Two – Once you have a useable name, check the biology of the plant and determine how it responds to various management tools. If you select chemical control, find a herbicide to use where your plant is on the label of that chemical.

Step Three – Do things on the land that help you keep the soil seed bank of unwanted pest plants low from growing new plants that will flower and seed.

Step Four - Change to different chemicals and/or tools of management if past tools were noted not to have done a good or adequate job controlling pest plants. Use common sense. Probably best not to keep using the same management tools year after year. No one method or tool can solve all of the brush/weed problems.

Step Five - When you have picked the first tool of management to attack your plant problem, begin planning on the next or follow-up tool to use. No one treatment by any of our current tools is a one-shot success story. The native woody plants and weeds will be here after we are gone.

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