

Early Spring is the Time to Get Ahead of Weeds

After finally receiving what feels like our first real storm of the winter, it looks like temperatures are starting to warm and spring may not be too far off. While it will be nice to see lush green grasses returning to our fields and pastures, we will also begin to see lush green weeds right along with them.

The good news is there are things we can do now — in early spring — to get ahead of weed pressure for the rest of the season.

Why is early spring a good time to treat weeds?

Early spring is when many of our annual and noxious weeds begin to germinate. Species like burr buttercup, mustards, and cheatgrass often emerge early, taking advantage of cool soil moisture before our desirable forage grasses are fully growing.

Too often, these weeds go unnoticed until late April or May when they are larger, more established, and harder — and more expensive — to control. Decisions made in March and early April often determine the level of weed pressure we deal with for the rest of the grazing season.

Prevention now is almost always cheaper than correction later.

Who are the main culprits in Juab County?

Several early invaders commonly show up in our area:

- **Burr buttercup**
- Mustards (including tumble mustard and flixweed)
- **Cheatgrass**

Burr buttercup is especially noticeable in early spring pastures. It germinates in the fall or very early spring and can quickly dominate thin stands. While livestock typically avoid it when adequate forage is available, heavy infestations can reduce overall forage production and create management challenges.

Cheatgrass is particularly concerning in rangeland and dryland pasture settings. It competes aggressively for moisture and matures early, reducing forage quality and increasing fire risk later in the season.

While these are some of the more recognizable weeds, they are not the only ones emerging. That is why early monitoring and correct identification are critical first steps in any weed management plan.

Why is early control so important?

Early control has the greatest impact on the rest of the growing season.

When weeds are small and actively growing, they are easier to manage — whether by grazing management, mechanical control, or herbicide application. Once weeds mature, they typically require higher input costs, more labor, and sometimes multiple treatments to achieve the same level of control.

Targeting weeds early also helps prevent seed production. One plant going to seed this spring can mean dozens — or hundreds — next year. Reducing seed production now lowers pressure not only later this grazing season but also in future years.

Early spring is also a critical growth window for our desirable pasture grasses. If weeds compete heavily during this time for moisture, sunlight, and nutrients, forage production can be significantly reduced.

How do I treat weeds?

There are three main approaches to weed control: cultural, mechanical, and chemical. Most successful programs use a combination of these tools.

Cultural control involves promoting healthy, competitive forage stands. Proper grazing management, avoiding overgrazing, maintaining fertility, and managing irrigation all help desirable species outcompete weeds.

Mechanical control includes mowing, tillage (where appropriate), hand removal, and other physical methods. Timing is critical — mowing after seed set, for example, often does little good.

Chemical control involves using herbicides to manage weeds. Herbicides can be very effective when weeds are small and actively growing. However, they are only one tool in the toolbox. Proper identification is essential before selecting a product, and applicators should always read and follow label directions, consider surrounding crops and sensitive areas, and apply under appropriate weather conditions.

Many people assume spraying is always the most efficient solution. In reality, long-term success often depends just as much on grazing management and maintaining strong forage stands as it does on herbicide use.

What can I do right now?

As fields and pastures begin to green up, one of the best management practices is simple: walk your ground.

Monitor plant growth. Identify what is coming up. Pay attention to thin areas where weeds are more likely to establish. Early observation allows for early action.

If you are unsure about plant identification or treatment options, the Extension office has factsheets and research-based recommendations to help producers and landowners make informed decisions.

A little time spent scouting in early spring can save time, money, and frustration throughout the growing season.