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Henbit

Although some may disagree henbit is not a word of curse. It is the name given to one of two winter annuals that are prevalent in the lawn, and in some cases fields, this time of year.

What are winter annuals? A winter annual is a plant whose seed germinates in the fall, survives in winter and grows quickly in late winter or early spring. They produce seed in spring and die by early summer. When they return it is from the seed produced in the spring but that seed does not germinate until fall.

Two of these weeds often confused for one another because of their color are henbit and dead nettle. Henbit, *Lamium amplexicaule*, is a hairy plant that has green leaves attached directly to the stem at the uppermost point on the plant. These leaves are deeply toothed at the margin. There is a purple flower whorled around the square stem of the plant.

Dead nettle or purple dead nettle, *Lamium purpureum*, is also related to henbit and has both a square stem and lighter pink or purple flowers whorled around this stem. These flowers are highlighted by purple tinged, triangular leaves. These leaves have a petiole and are not directly attached to the stem unlike henbit.

Control strategies for these winter annuals must occur in fall. Two important things can be done to reduce these weeds. Make sure there is a dense stand of turfgrass in the fall which will compete with the seeds as they germinate. Cool season grasses should be fertilized or reseeded in fall if they are thin. If the lawn is composed of warm season grass then manage the turf by watering it well through the summer and applying fertilizer in early summer to produce competitive growth that will become thick and dense by fall.

If reseeding is not needed for cool season turf, or if these annual weeds have a large population that needs to be reduced quickly, a pre-emergent can be applied by the first of September. Granular forms of pre-emergent can be found at most garden supply locations. Before purchasing the bag, read the label to make sure it will control broadleaf weeds such as henbit or dead nettle. Once applied, the granular chemical must be watered in with at least ½ inch of water. Always read the label and directions for proper application rates and practices before applying.

In the spring check the lawn to make sure there are no bare spots where winter annuals normally fill in. If bare spots are noticed then apply grass seed in those areas to fill in and help prevent further weed establishment in the future.

The Extension office is open Monday - Friday, located in Kennett, Missouri at 233 North Main Street. For horticulture questions contact the horticulture specialist at 573-686-8064. MU is an equal opportunity/ADA institution.