

At your Service
Sarah Denkler
Horticulture Specialist
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To Kill A Sandbur?

Many of you are asking so here is the answer for getting rid of that wonderful weed called the sandbur.

Sandbur is an annual grass from the genus *Cenchrus* that is often found in poorly maintained sandy soils. It is on the noxious weed list in 46 states for good reason. It prefers sun to shade and can often make its way into the average yard. The plant is in the family *Poaceae* or the grass family and early in the year resembles grasses that we are familiar with. Once the plant forms spiny, sharp spurs we realize that it is more vicious than a common grass.

Also known as burgrass the key to keeping the sandbur out of the yard is to maintain a healthy and dense stand of grass. Many have likely heard that lime can be added or nitrogen in order to eliminate the sandbur. What is really happening when you add one of these amendments is that you are helping to improve the lawn. Proper mowing, fertilization and watering, will keep your grass healthy and prevent the incursion of sandbur in your yard.

Most of those who call already have the problem. The way to control sandbur that is already established is to use pre-emergent herbicides. This must be done in March, before the soil temperature reaches 52 degrees Fahrenheit and seeds germinate. A second application should be put down in June. Always read the label and follow directions carefully to avoid overuse. The same pre-emergent that is used to control crabgrass is often used to control sandbur. Read the label to make sure that sandbur is included in the list of weeds controlled. Some chemical names for control of sandbur include: Treflan, Pendamethalin, Balan, Benefin and Oryzalin. These are sold under brand names such as: Barricade, Team, Surflan and Amaze Grass and Weed Preventor. Be aware that even with chemical application, it will often take 2 or 3 years to remove sandbur from the yard and even then, it can return as animals bring new seeds to the area.

If you don't get pre-emergent control down you can use a post-emergent such as MSMA crabgrass killer or roundup. MSMA should be applied when temperatures are above 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Use these products when weeds are small and growing actively. As weeds mature, they become more difficult to kill and will begin to produce new seed. If this happens you will have sandbur again next year. It cannot be used if you have St. Augustine or Centipede lawns as it will kill your lawn. MSMA can be sprayed over Bermuda, Zoysia or buffalo grass but can cause your lawn to yellow. A good application method is to spray ½ the rate in an east to west pattern and the other half in a north to south pattern. This will help even out your control pattern. If you use Roundup remember that it will kill anything it touches and should only be used as a spot spray.

Don't forget that proper lawn maintenance must be practiced to help remove and keep sandbur out of the lawn. Proper management includes mowing with sufficient frequency to prevent the removal of no more than 1/3 of the height of your grass at one time. Removing more than 1/3 will weaken the roots and slow development of grass. The higher grass is cut the healthier the root system. Fertilize in early spring for cool season grass and again in fall; fertilize in late spring for warm season grass.

If turf is weak and sparse then focus on seeding in fall and/or spring to try to bring your lawn density up and increase competition for the same water, nutrients and space. Pre-emergent cannot be used when seeding or reseeding a lawn. Mowing and hand pulling can be used to reduce sandbur populations during a year when seeding is the priority. Sandbur will modify their growth habit from upright to horizontal growth as the season progresses and continue to grow until a freeze.

Persistence is the most important control strategy. Using all the above mentioned actions to control the sandbur will amount to nothing without scouting for the weed persistently to ensure it doesn't return.

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.