

Henbit

By Andy Luke, field specialist in agronomy

Several calls have come in to the Extension office recently about the purple flowers in many area fields or open areas. These flowers are from henbit, a low-growing winter annual weed common in no-till systems.

Like other winter annuals, henbit emerges primarily in the fall and overwinters as a seedling. As the weather warms up in the spring, the plant grows quickly, especially in areas with adequate moisture. Rising temperatures encourage henbit to produce seeds, with most henbit completing its life cycle by the end of May.

Henbit is most easily identified by its purple flowers. In the mint family, henbit will have a square stem with leaves wrapped tightly around the stem. The leaves will appear jagged and closely resemble other mint leaves. It is commonly confused with purple deadnettle, another mint family plant, but henbit will not have petioles while purple deadnettle will.

Henbit is considered a weed in most circumstances. It can serve as an alternate host for soybean cyst nematodes and tomato spotted wilt, but rarely effects row-crop yields. It can easily be controlled with herbicides, but control becomes tougher after flowering. One benefit to henbit is that it serves as an early season source of pollen and nectar for pollinators such as honeybees.

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