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Fireweed (*Urtica chamaedryoides*) – The One That Feels Like You Put Your Hand In Flames!



Photos: Sharon Fox Gamble

The common name Fireweed is applied to many plants. Some for the flame-like flower appearance and others for the sensation one experiences after touching the plants.

Fireweed (*Urtica chamaedryoides*) is native to Florida. The plant became noticeably widespread in Central Florida around 1987 and has increased in frequency each year since.

Fireweed grows in a number of areas but prefers moist “disturbed” sites. “Disturbed” defined as areas that have had soil impact caused by humans, animals, equipment, etc. Fireweed is frequently found in areas where the grass is thinner or less competitive. Its presence is usually noticed in January and February and tends to die in May with the onset of summer temperatures.

Fireweed is particularly troublesome because it possesses small, ~~but visual on close inspection,~~ ~~stinging~~ stiff hairs that easily embed in skin. Once exposed to the toxin, severe irritation can occur for several hours. Generally avoided by cattle, horses are more likely to browse fireweed and develop stress symptoms. These symptoms commonly manifest themselves as difficulty in swallowing, difficulty breathing for many days after consumption, and weight loss. In extreme cases, young horses have died after rolling in fireweed and becoming over-exposed to the toxins in the leaf hairs.



UF IFAS Extension Weed Specialists conducted research to determine the most effective methods to control this irritating weed. Mowing offered little control. The remaining plants appeared to grow smaller and increased the number of stinging hairs. Also, the sticky substance on the tiny seeds will adhere to mower blades and be spread elsewhere.

Chemical control with 2,4-D, Weedmaster, Remedy Ultra, Pasturegard HL, GrazonNext HL, Glyphosate and Telar were tested. With control rates of 90% - 100% with several products (Table 1) there is no need to combine herbicides to increase kill rates. If you do not want to store herbicides, determine how much herbicide you will need and purchase only the amount you need. The decision between using what may already be in the barn versus buying additional product should be considered when deciding what product to use. It is a waste of time to utilize an ineffective product. Remember the “Label it the Law” and you cannot make a weed twice as dead by increasing the recommended rate.

Table 1. Control of fireweed with various herbicides

Herbicide	Rate Product/Acre	Herbicide cost \$ per acre ¹	% Control	
			2 weeks after treatment	6 weeks after treatment
2,4-D amine	2qt.	6	10	0
Weedmaster	1.5 qt.	7	33	65
Remedy Ultra	1 qt.	14 – 20	93	100
Pasturegard HL	24 fl. Oz	20	92	100
GrazonNext HL	24 fl. Oz.	8	95	100
Telar	0.5 oz.	10	30	10

¹These values are approximate which may or may not be current but are used for comparison.

Per label instructions: GrazonNext HL: the application rate for backpack sprayers, for the 24 fl.Oz. per acre rate, is .55 Oz. (16 ml.) / 1000 square feet.

Note: The aminopyralid in GrazonNext HL has an 18 month residual effect. Please read the label carefully and understand the responsibilities of supplying hay and manure to others. It is mandatory to follow the “Use Precautions and Restrictions” section of this product label.