Weed Identification

“But at least the weeds are green!” I shouted as we pulled into our driveway one Sunday. I could not believe my eyes. Our beautifully green, lush carpet of centipede grass had horrid, sickly yellow patches all through it. “It must be some disease!” my husband claimed quickly. “I only sprayed the weeds.”

My husband had decided to go on a little herbicide application spree during the previous week. This would have been fine had he contained it to the backyard where we have Bermuda grass. But as men do sometimes, he got spray-happy and spot sprayed the weeds in the front yard where we have centipede grass.

I turned to him slowly in the car, “What did you spray?”

“Ummmm… MSMA, I think.”

My first thought was, “Are you kidding me!?” Here I am an Extension agricultural agent that preaches about reading labels and correct pesticide use, and my husband with a turfgrass management degree did not read the label! MSMA works well on Bermuda grass, but will kill centipede grass on contact.

Everyone makes mistakes, and he owned up to his. But this whole fiasco happened about 4 weeks ago, and our lawn is still recovering. The neighbors have not let him live it down, and neither shall I, but what can we learn from this? A lot.

Knowing how to kill weeds is only half the battle. Knowing what the weed is, and how a chemical will react in different grasses is the other half. Many times clients call me and want to know what chemical will kill a specific weed. Well if that’s all you want to know, then just go out and use some glyphosate. Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide that will kill anything green. What most people really want to know is how to kill a specific weed without hurting their turfgrass.

Weed identification and herbicide selection is extremely important in the care and maintenance of any landscape. Some of the basics include deciding if a weed is broadleaved, grassy, or a sedge.
Grassy weeds have narrow thin leaves. Sedges have a triangular stem when rolled between two fingers. Even this basic classification of a weed can help in determining how to get rid of it.

All herbicides must list the weeds that it will control on the label. It also will indicate what turfgrasses it is for use on, and at what rate it should be sprayed. Reading the label on an herbicide is like reading your personal prescription label. Just because it says to take one a day does not mean that taking two will work better. It could mean that two will really do some harm.

If this has sparked your interest and you want to learn more about weed identification and control in your lawn and landscape, then come join us Tuesday, August 23 from 7-9 p.m. at the O. P. Owens Agriculture Center for a hands-on informational workshop. Bring a weed from home that you want identified. We will discuss the top twenty weeds found in our area and how to control them.

If you would like to reserve your seat for the class on August 23, or if you have questions, concerns, or comments, please feel free to contact me, Kerrie Roach, horticultural Extension agent, at North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, by E-mail at Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu or call me at 910-671-3276. To learn more about Extension visit North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center’s website at Robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.