

WEED AWARENESS

Noxious Weed Control – It's the Law!

Sheridan County Weed Control

The Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act states that “it is the duty of every person who owns or controls land in the state of Nebraska to effectively control noxious weeds on such land.” It's the law, pure and simple.

What is a Noxious Weed and Where Do They Come From?

Noxious weeds are non-native invasive plants — most of which originated in Europe — and arrived in the U.S. by accident in the ballast of a ship, or on purpose as an ornamental. Because these plants are not native, the insects, diseases and animals that would normally help to control these plants, are not found here. This gives the weeds the advantage to invade and crowd out desirable vegetation in cropland, pasture, rangeland and other native habitats. These weeds invade roadsides and disturbed areas, displacing native plants and reducing habitat quality for wildlife.

Noxious weeds are spread by seed, wind, water, animals and neighbors. Forage moving from one landowner, county or

state to another should be noxious weed-seed free. For most noxious weeds, the seeds can lay dormant in the soil for many years, just waiting for the opportunity to fill a void in disturbed or neglected areas.

Perhaps the Most Important Step to Noxious Weed Control is Prevention

Be on the lookout on your property for “plants out of place,” and learn to identify noxious and invasive plants. If detected quickly, noxious weeds can be controlled before they get a chance to get established.

I've Got Noxious Weeds on My Property. Now What Do I Do?

Once noxious or invasive weeds are found on your property, there are several factors which can affect your noxious weed control:

- Correct plant identification.
- Method of control.
- If using an herbicide, using the right product for the job.
- Appropriate timing of control (i.e. proper growth stage of the plant).



Noxious weeds are non-native invasive plants legally designated as a serious threat to agriculture and landscapes.

Your local County Weed Control or Extension office should be able to assist with plant identification. The best tool to help answer many weed control questions is Nebraska Extension's *Guide for Weed, Disease and Insect Management in Nebraska* (EC130). It is updated annually, and can be purchased from your local Extension office.

Types of control for noxious and invasive weeds can include cultural, mechanical, biological or herbicide control. **Cultural** control involves the establishment of competitive vegetation to prevent or slow down the invasion of weeds. **Mechanical** control includes pulling, digging, disking, plowing or mowing noxious

weeds. **Biological** control includes the use of federally approved insects or pathogens that attack specific weed species. **Herbicide** control includes the use of herbicides that are often the most economical and effective type of control. Herbicides are specific for each noxious weed, so make sure you apply the right herbicide, at the right time and according to the label instructions. The label is the LAW!

What is the advantage of spraying a small patch of noxious weeds? If you get that patch sprayed when it's the size of a pickup — it may cost a few dollars. Wait until those weeds spread across several acres, and you now have to invest hundreds

or thousands of dollars. If you choose to ignore or procrastinate your noxious weed control, in the long run, you'll spend more dollars, as well as time.

How about certified organic farmers? Are they exempt from controlling noxious weeds? No, not at all. It is the duty of every landowner to control the noxious weeds on his or her property. There are alternative control methods and products that can be used to meet organic certification standards. If someone has gone through the steps to be certified organic, they should be aware of approved practices.

Be a Weed Warrior

Are you doing the very best to protect your land from the invasion of more noxious and invasive weeds? Or are you doing just enough to get by?

Weeds know no boundaries. As good stewards of our land, whether it's a small lawn in town or a 5,000 acre farm/ranch operation, homeowners and landowners must work to keep land free of noxious weeds. If you are persistent and willing to work at noxious weed control as part of your management practice, the diligence will pay off.

Be Careful What You Plant

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Most of the plants we grow now are hybrids. The seeds produced from these hybrids don't always resemble their parent plants. It's sad when all your hard work to grow these seeds ends up in growing nothing more than weeds.

Bamboos and ornamental grasses can give an exotic flair to your garden. These plants, while beautiful, are known to be aggressive growers and spreaders. Bamboo is quick growing, spreads by rhizomes and can fill an area quickly. The grasses can live more than one year and spread by both rhizomes and seed. In the past, our cold Nebraska winters have limited these plants from spreading too much. Use caution and monitor these plants if you feel the need to experiment with them.

Over the past few decades, two things have changed that could make our state much more hospitable to these fast growers. First, the USDA has changed the hardiness zones, reflecting that our winters are not as cold as they used to be. Plants that never could survive here, can now thrive here. The second thing happening is new plants are being developed or discovered which are more tolerant to our cold winters than they used to be.

Keep in mind, 3 of Nebraska's 12 State Noxious Weeds were first introduced to homeowners as ornamental plants: Purple loosestrife, Saltcedar and Japanese knotweed. These eventually escaped cultivation, requiring them to be declared noxious and control is now mandatory.

If you see your new plants are spreading out of control, please contact your county weed superintendent for assistance to prevent a breakout of an unwanted pest.

TAKE 2

Two minutes to **read about** two invasive plants which are working to establish themselves in Lancaster County

Lancaster County Weed Control



St. Johnswort
(*Hypericum perforatum* L.)

St. Johnswort is sometimes an invasive plant that originally came from Europe. It is a flowering, herbaceous perennial plant with extensive, creeping rhizomes. It prefers sandy soils and is found in central and eastern Great Plains and scattered westward in prairies, pastures and disturbed fields.

St. Johnswort can be identified by the leaves and flowers. The leaves have distinctive scattered translucent dots. The dots are conspicuous when held up to the light, giving the leaves the “perforated” appearance. The flowers are orangish-yellow, with five petals with conspicuous black dots. The flowering is June through August.

St. Johnswort reproduces by rhizomes and seeds that can persist for decades in the soil seed bank, germinating following disturbance. Like many other invasive plants, the seeds can



also be spread by wildlife, livestock and machinery. Seeds are eaten by mourning doves and quail.

In pastures, St Johnswort acts as both a toxic and invasive weed. It replaces native plant communities and forage vegetation to the extent of making productive land nonviable, becoming an invasive species in natural habitats and ecosystems. It is listed as a noxious weed in more than twenty countries and is considered toxic to some livestock. Ingestion by horses, sheep and cattle can cause photosensitization, central nervous system depression, spontaneous abortion or death.

St. Johnswort is on Nebraska's Watch List and its spread being monitored. It is very prevalent throughout Lancaster County.

For help with identification or control recommendations, contact your local county weed control superintendent.



Sulphur Cinquefoil
(*Potentilla recta* L.)

Sulphur cinquefoil is an invasive weed that originally came from Europe. It was often planted in flower beds because of its attractive flower. This member of the rose family is a very drought-resistant, winter-hardy perennial that prefers full sun light. It grows best in well-drained or sandy soil and is found growing in pastures, hay meadows, roadsides, yards and around building sites.

Sulphur cinquefoil can be identified by the leaves and flowers. The leaves are similar to strawberry leaves and are divided into five or seven leaflets, with triangular teeth on the margins. The flowers are pale sulphur yellow, with five heart-shaped petals and a bright yellow center. The flowering period is from May through July.



Sulphur cinquefoil reproduces mostly by seed. Although the seeds are only viable for approximately two years, one plant can produce up to 1600 seeds. Mature sulphur cinquefoil plants can live up to 20 years as new shoots emerge from the mother plant. Like many other invasive plants, the seeds can also be spread by wildlife, livestock and machinery.

Sulphur cinquefoil was added to the Nebraska Watch List in 2009. We have found it to be very prevalent throughout Lancaster County. Watch for this invader on your property.

For help with identification or for recommendations for control, contact your local county weed control superintendent.