

## “WOULDN'T IT BE LOVERLY” IF WEEDS WERE NOT A PROBLEM FOR CHRISTMAS TREE GROWERS?

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Wouldn't it be lovely if Christmas tree growers did not have to worry about pests in their trees, such as mites and scales, and needle blights and, of course, weeds? It is true that many lay people think of Christmas tree growing as planting a seedling and then watching it grow until it is time for harvest. Wouldn't it be lovely if that were true? But, of course, it isn't, so pest control, including weed control, requires planning, and execution (call it work!) to be successful. Well, the season is not yet ready for the execution, but winter is a good time to plan for the pest control activities in the spring

A successful weed control program is more achievable if growers know the weeds in their plantation, especially the ones that were troublesome last year. Chances are that the most prevalent weeds in early August are the ones to deal with this year. If these weeds were perennials or woody invaders, hopefully you applied Roundup in the fall. However, some still can be controlled before conifer bud break in the spring.

Last year was the first that many growers in the Eastern U.S. could buy Westar, a combination of two herbicides – Oust (sulfometuron-methyl) and Velpar (hexazinone) in about a 1 to 10 ratio. Last year we were questioning the safety of Westar on Colorado spruce so we conducted an experiment in 2007 to enhance our knowledge. We applied Westar at 8, 10, 12 and 16 ounces of product per acre over young Colorado spruce established for one year with some restocking of dead plants before treatment. We also included treatments with 8 or 12 ounces of Westar plus an added 5 ounces of Velpar 75 DF, which can improve longevity of weed control.

Our standard treatment of SureGuard 51% at 12 ounces per acre, plus Roundup Original at 1½ pints per acre was also included.

What we found was that Westar at 8 or 10 ounces per acre or Westar at 8 ounces plus Velpar 75 DF at 5 ounces per acre caused no visual injury to the Colorado spruce that were restocked or established for one season. Higher rates caused some injury. Adding Roundup to the SureGuard improved control of the perennial bindweed but also injured the newly-planted spruces. This was not surprising. Sometimes treating dormant newly-planted conifers with Roundup causes no injury and sometimes it does. A word to the wise--Apply Roundup only over well-established (one season in the field) spruce and true firs, except at very low rates—perhaps up to 12 to 16 ounces per acre.

So, based on this experiment, I suggest using no more than 8 ounces per acre of Westar for dormant Colorado spruce, as well as for other newly-planted conifer transplants (2-2 or 2-3 or plugs plus one or older).

Keep in mind a few other things about Westar:

1. It is economical (costing only \$30 per lb. in 2007). If one treated 50% bands, as we suggest, treating an acre of Christmas trees with 8 ounces of Westar per acre costs only about \$15 at 2007 prices for material.
2. Westar controls quackgrass and yellow nutsedge, field horsetail (*Equisetum* spp.) wild raspberries and vetches as well as most annual weeds but is weak on many other perennials. Therefore, Roundup in the fall may still be required to control perennial weeds and brush.
3. Westar is not for growers who spot treat and do not calibrate

either their backpack or tractor-mounted sprayers. 4. Avoid spraying Westar in wet areas where conifer roots are shallow and more subject to damage and where a heavy rain event following application may carry it into untreated row middles and kill your desirable ground cover.

For those of you who choose to use other herbicides, there are several things to remember. First, it is important to inventory your pest control products annually and use up the older ones as soon as possible. Federal and state regulations and product registrations do change and sometimes legal uses now become illegal. When this happens you may have to pay to dispose of a product for which you already have spent good money.

Secondly, we already have some excellent herbicides. SureGuard (flumioxazin) is an excellent choice for newly-planted or established stock either in the field or in transplant beds, but not seedbeds! In some seasons, annual grasses invade during the summer but SureGuard usually gives longer control of annual weeds than combinations of simazine (Princep, Sim-Trol), preemergence grass herbicides such as Pendulum (pendimethalin), Surflan (oryzalin) or Pennant Magnum (s-metolachlor). However, those combinations still are viable choices for many growers. None of the above control many perennial weeds, the exception being Pennant Magnum which controls yellow nutsedge. Simazine combinations with atrazine (Aatrex, Atrazine) at 2+2 or 2+3 pounds active ingredient per acre control quackgrass and several other perennial grasses very effectively.

We continue to be enthusiastic about mid- to late- June applications of a 3-way combination to clean up annuals and suppress perennials. The combination is Roundup Original at 4 fluid ounces per acre plus Goal 2XL at 16 ounces per acre (or Goal Tender at 8 ounces per acre) plus Stinger at 4 ounces per acre. This combination is especially effective against

broadleaves such as ragweed, and pigweed. Immature seedling weeds, including annual grasses are more susceptible than mature weeds.

Wouldn't it be lovely if all your plans and efforts in controlling weeds this spring work well and your weed problems are solved for this year? Just in case they do not or if you have any further questions, do not hesitate to call me at 860-683-4985 or Todd Mervosh at 860-683-4984. We hope you have a great growing season!

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