

Drought and Noxious Weeds

Prolonged periods of dry conditions affect weed growth, alter herbicide performance, and complicate weed management strategies.

With the drought experienced in Lancaster County and across the state most would expect that our noxious weed inspections and infestations would have been less in 2012. Unfortunately, one of the things that make a noxious weed so hard to control is the ability to survive during stressful conditions. We find, especially with the deep rooted perennials such as leafy spurge, knotweed, Canada thistle and phragmites, they are able to out compete other vegetation for water and nutrients to survive.

Performance of herbicides also changes during dry conditions. Plants under stress from drought are difficult to control since water-stressed weeds have thicker waxy leaves (cuticle), reducing herbicide absorption into the plant. Plant growth processes are also altered, reducing movement of herbicides within the target weeds to sites of action.

The results are less than you would expect and far less than if the plant is healthy and taking in nutrients.

Noxious weeds are very aggressive, any time a pasture is overgrazed it is easier for invasive plants to outcompete the native grasses and legumes. Pastures will require extra attention this growing season if they were overgrazed. Weed seeds lay dormant for years; with very little grass competition the sunlight will germinate those dormant seeds. Aggressive weed control methods will need to be practiced to keep weeds from robbing moisture and nutrients from the desirable plants.



Caption:

Ideal time to control musk thistle is when the plant is small and actively growing.