



Natural Resources Conservation Service
9173 West Barnes Drive, Suite C
Boise, ID 83709-1574
www.id.nrcs.usda.gov

Jody Fagan, Public Affairs Specialist
Office: (208) 378-5725
Fax: (208) 378-5735
jody.fagan@id.usda.gov

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:

Jody Fagan, (208) 378-5725

Small Acreage Owners Can Win the Weed War

They seem to pop up over night. Marching through the garden, along irrigation ditches and across pastures. Ask an Idaho small acreage owner about weeds and you might get a frustrated sigh.

“Buying a small acreage doesn’t usually come with an instruction manual,” says Loren St. John, manager for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Plant Materials Center in Aberdeen. “Many owners aren’t aware of practices that can help prevent weed infestation or the options for getting rid of them.”

Weeds cost the Idaho economy hundreds of millions of dollars annually. From cheatgrass and meadow salsify (goat’s beard) to one of the state’s 35 designated noxious weeds, such as purple loosestrife, Canada thistle, field bindweed and whitetop, property owners can help reduce the cost of weed infestations through proper identification and vegetation management.

One of the first steps small acreage owners can take to control weeds is to change the practices that allowed weeds to become established in the first place. For example, continuous grazing of livestock can result in bare soil, allowing weeds to establish more readily.

“Many new small acreage owners aren’t aware of proper vegetation management,” St. John says. “I often see horses camping on a five-acre pasture all year long.”

To better manage their pastures, small acreage owners can:

- Plant long-lived perennial irrigated grasses such as orchardgrass, meadow brome, tall fescue or intermediate wheatgrass, or dryland grasses such as crested wheatgrass, Siberian wheatgrass or Russian wildrye. Once established, and with proper grazing management, the grass will help prevent the weeds from establishing and spreading.

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- Graze livestock for shorter periods of time. Don't allow pasture grasses to be grazed shorter than 4 to 6 inches and allow plants to grow to about 8 to 10 inches in height before grazing. Plan on supplementing your animal's diet with hay and grain.

"It's also a good idea for small acreage owners to team up with neighbors," St. John says. "Managing weeds throughout a neighborhood will help make overall weed eradication more successful."

Additional weed control methods include:

- Mow weeds before they go to seed.
- Pull small weed patches by hand.
- If flowers or seeds are present when pulling weeds, prevent the seeds from falling back on the ground and place them in a plastic bag or container. Dispose of by burning or taking them to a sanitary landfill.
- Use EPA-registered herbicides. Carefully read and follow the directions for proper application.
- Do not use, mix or store herbicides near wells or other water sources.
- Apply herbicides only when the air is relatively calm. Herbicide drift can kill desirable grasses, trees and shrubs.

For more information on weeds, visit the NRCS website at www.id.nrcs.usda.gov or contact your county weed superintendent or county extension office. A publication titled, "Living on a Few Acres," is available from local USDA Service Centers.

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