

David Hallauer
District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Fall Musk Thistle Control

There are lots of grassland weeds more bothersome than musk thistle – sericea lespedeza and hemp dogbane come to mind. That doesn't mean musk thistle isn't important. It is still a noxious weed and left unchecked can become a real problem in our grasslands.

With most other weeds giving up for the year, fall can be a good time to focus on musk thistle. Because they're considered a biennial or a winter annual, they have a rosette stage in the fall and early spring prior to bolting early the next summer. This fall rosette stage is the time when it's easiest to control. Not only are the rosettes relatively easy to find, other plants that could be injured by offsite herbicide movement are mostly dormant.

The application window for fall applications is fairly wide, with control possible until the ground is frozen, and plants have shut down until spring. Light freeze events will damage plants, but as long as green tissue exists, plants are still susceptible to chemical controls.

There are lots of active ingredients available to control musk thistles. Dicamba and 2,4-D containing products – alone or in combination – can yield good results (one KSU study showed better fall application results with LVE formulations of 2,4-D vs. amine formulations). Other active ingredients include picloram, aminopyralid and metsulfuron. Picloram and aminopyralid containing products will provide fall control plus get some of the emerging seedlings next spring.

When possible, select a warm, sunny day to spray. Dry weather this fall may reduce control levels. If you want to look further at products/rates, the 2023 KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide (online at <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/CHEMWEEDGUIDE.pdf> or upon request via any District Extension Office – drop me a line at dhallaue@ksu.edu and we'll get you a book...) is a great resource. Local noxious weed departments can also be a great resource, for both recommendations and product sales.