



The Habitat Corner

USING HERBICIDES TO MANAGE YOUR LAND FOR WILDLIFE

Chris Hunter, TWRA Private Lands Biologist

Herbicide applications can be one of the most useful practices for maintaining high quality habitat on the landscape. Herbicides can be used to control undesirable plant species and maintain early successional vegetation. Used properly, they can be one of the greatest allies of a land manager.

Statement: "Generic herbicides are not as reliable as well-known name brand products."

This statement is not true. Generic herbicides work just fine. However, make sure the amount of active ingredient applied per acre is followed, as the amount in a generic product may not be equivalent to the comparable "name brand" herbicide. Also, be sure to use a good surfactant (which helps the herbicide stick to the plant), according to the herbicide label when applying post-emergence applications.

Statement: "There are small sapling trees coming up in my native grass field and I seem to get a good kill anytime during the growing season."

This statement is not true. Small trees can be sprayed any time after full leaf-out, usually from mid-May through early October in Tennessee. However, if they are sprayed before full leaf-out, resprouting is much more likely. Most biologists recommend spraying trees during late summer or early fall when trees are going dormant and taking everything needed to make it through the winter down to the root. If the herbicide is applied at the terminal bud (top of the tree) and leaves below, the tree will take this chemical down to the root and should kill the entire tree, including its root system.

Statement: "It is not that important to follow label directions precisely. As long as I apply a decent amount of the herbicide, I should be safe and get a good kill."

This statement is completely inaccurate. You must always follow label directions for several reasons. First, if you apply too much herbicide, the potential for runoff into water systems is more likely resulting in the herbicide not staying in the targeted location. Second, if you apply too much of an herbicide that is "soil active" (ingredient remains active in the soil for extended time), the soil could remain bare for weeks or months, potentially causing erosion issues or problems establishing desired vegetation. Also, it is Tennessee state law that you must always follow label directions and safety directions when applying pesticides (herbicides or insecticides).



ASK THE BIOLOGIST

- Q: I would like to prepare my farm to plant native warm season grasses and forbs for wildlife. What herbicide should I use to eradicate the existing plant species?
- A: First, it is important to realize that it is often unnecessary to plant native grasses and forbs to provide early successional cover for wildlife. Most often, after you eradicate the undesirable plant cover, plants arising from the seedbank will provide the structure required by wildlife that use early successional communities. This can also save you money and effort involved in direct planting of seeds. On previously cropped fields or old pastures and hayfields, many agricultural "weeds" can be expected. However, ragweeds, pigweeds, pokeweed, horseweed, broomsedge, blackberry, beggar's lice, etc. provide outstanding cover and food resources. Follow the recommendations of your professional planning biologist for specific herbicide recommendations to control existing cover in old hayfields and pasture, as recommendations will vary based on the existing plant complex. Once you have killed the existing cover, have the biologist visit the site the following summer and evaluate plant composition and discuss further herbicide control, management practices, or planting options.

More specific information on use of herbicides for plant establishment or control can be found at www.twraprivalands.org under the "Management of Habitats" link at the lower left.

"Helping Landowners and Wildlife Through Habitat Enhancement"

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has Private Lands Biologists that will assist you in developing a management plan for your property and a strategy to implement it. See www.TWRAprivalands.org for who to contact for technical assistance and other useful information on habitat management and programs.