

# TIME TO START THINKING ABOUT *Smutgrass* CONTROL

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It's that time of year again. The rainy season is about to begin, and most everything is turning from brown to green, including our most troublesome grass weed – smutgrass. We get many questions each year concerning different cultural practices for smutgrass control. We've put together a list of frequently asked questions regarding smutgrass control below.



## 1. WHERE DID SMUTGRASS COME FROM?

The smutgrasses found in pastures in Florida are part of a genus of grasses called *Sporobolus*. There are approximately 34 species of *Sporobolus* found in the United States, many of which are native. The two species of smutgrass found in Florida – small smutgrass and giant smutgrass – are invasive species, native to Asia.

## 2. WHEN DOES SMUTGRASS PRODUCE SEED?

Seed production of both species occurs throughout the growing season, and new seedheads are produced shortly after mowing or burning. The seeds, which are red to orange in color, remain attached to seedheads for some time after maturing and are spread by adhering to livestock and machinery or by movement via water and wind. Natural seed germination has been shown to average less than 9%, and seed are thought to remain viable in the soil for at least two years.

## 3. WHAT HERBICIDE IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR SMUTGRASS CONTROL?

For selective smutgrass control in bahiagrass and bermudagrass (except 'Jiggs'), apply hexazinone (Velpar, Tide Hexazinone, Velossa) at 0.75 to 1.0 lb ai/acre (3 to 4 pt/A Velpar/Tide Hexazinone; 2.5 to 3.33 pt/A Velossa). Smutgrass can also be spot-treated with a 1-2% v/v glyphosate solution.

## 4. WHAT ABOUT MOWING AND/OR BURNING SMUTGRASS BEFORE HEXAZINONE APPLICATION?

Simply speaking, there is no advantage or disadvantage to using these cultural practices before applying hexazinone. Furthermore, mowing has been suggested to increase seed spread, and burning has been said to increase smutgrass seed germination. However, these practices will make smutgrass more palatable to cattle for a 1 to 3-week period, with similar forage quality to that of bahiagrass. If you are spot-treating with glyphosate, pretreatment burning or mowing can be helpful, but not always required.

## 5. WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO APPLY HEXAZINONE?

The best time appears to be any time during the rainy season from the end of June through August (sometimes into September if you're lucky). Remember that rainfall is the key to smutgrass control with hexazinone. In fact, our most recent research has shown that hexazinone is the most effective with at least 0.25" and no more than 3" of rainfall.

## 6. ARE THERE GRAZING RESTRICTIONS FOR HEXAZINONE?

There are no grazing restrictions for hexazinone at the rates suggested for smutgrass control; see the label for restrictions based on application rate. There is a 38-day haying restriction.



## 7. DO I NEED TO APPLY AN ADJUVANT WITH HEXAZINONE?

Most of the smutgrass activity from hexazinone comes from root uptake, however, there is some foliar activity. The addition of an adjuvant may aid in control if rain does not occur within a week after hexazinone application. However, our data indicates that the addition of an adjuvant did not increase smutgrass control compared to hexazinone alone.

## 8. CAN I APPLY HEXAZINONE ONLY ONCE AND NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT SMUTGRASS AGAIN?

I hope you already know the answer to this, but many tend to spray and wait 3 to 4 years before applying hexazinone a second time. The frustration stems from inadequate or excessive rainfall following application that often results in control failure. We will never get ahead of smutgrass by treating smutgrass and waiting more than a year for a repeat application. For this reason, we recommend an annual application of hexazinone of at least 0.75 lb/acre the first year. Some ranchers have adopted hexazinone on their total weed control program (it is quite broad-spectrum) and are treating their entire pasture for general weeds at 0.5 lb/A annually for at least two years.



## 9. I HAVE OAK TREES IN MY PASTURE. CAN I STILL APPLY HEXAZINONE IF I WANT TO SAVE THE TREES?

This is a really tough question to answer, and we urge caution with hexazinone around oak trees. In most cases, keeping the application outside of the drip line is sufficient to ensure tree safety. However, if you can tell that surface water flows toward the base of desirable trees, it is best to stay further away from those trees. In those situations, use glyphosate as a spot-treatment or in a weed wiper.

## 10. I HAVE TO USE GLYPHOSATE FOR SMUTGRASS CONTROL BECAUSE OF THE OAK TREES IN MY PASTURE. WHEN AND HOW SHOULD I APPLY GLYPHOSATE?

In general, glyphosate can be applied anytime that smutgrass is actively growing. For spot-treating glyphosate mix at a 1-2% concentration (1.4 to 2.8 oz/gallon of water). If you plan to use a weed-wiper, the concentration should be at least a 10% v/v solution. Please note that using a weed-wiper is more of an art than a science. It takes practice and patience when using a weed-wiper, and plants should be wiped in two directions.

## 11. CAN I JUST GRAZE SMUTGRASS AND NOT APPLY HERBICIDES?

This approach is possible, but smutgrass generally becomes unpalatable 2 to 3 weeks after mowing or burning unless the plants are grazed by livestock. Some success has been achieved by mowing sections of a pasture and allowing cattle to graze fresh regrowth through a rotational grazing pattern.

## 12. WHEN SHOULD I CONSIDER PASTURE RENOVATION VERSUS SELECTIVE HERBICIDE TREATMENT?

Pasture renovation should occur when >70% of the pasture is infested with smutgrass. If you can't take a step in the pasture without stepping on smutgrass, it's time for renovation. If you're in this situation, spray the entire pasture with 4 qt/acre glyphosate, wait three to four weeks and begin tillage.

## 13. IF I RENOVATE THE PASTURE, SHOULD I EXPECT SMUTGRASS TO COME BACK?

The short answer to this question is yes. In our experiments, we actually doubled our smutgrass population by renovating a pasture. However, applying hexazinone at 0.5 lb/acre resulted in >90% control of these small smutgrass plants. Therefore, it is important to apply hexazinone the year after seeding occurred during the rainy season. It is imperative to scout those pastures annually and apply hexazinone as needed.

## 14. WHAT CAN I DO FOR SMUTGRASS IN HEMARTHRIA (LIMPOGRASS/FLORALTA)?

In general, we don't recommend applications of hexazinone onto limpopgrass. However, there comes a point of "something needs to be done" – either we spray with hexazinone or we renovate the pasture. In our experience, applying hexazinone to limpopgrass that has been cut or fertilized prior to hexazinone results in more severe injury than when not cut or fertilized.