

Heritage Weed Control

or You can do a lot with a sharp hoe.

This article is about weeds. More specifically weed control.

We all have our own definition of weeds. Maybe I am soft on weeds but to me a plant is not a weed unless it causes a real problem in my pastures. I think almost all plants have a useful purpose in providing nutrients or medication. I am inclined to let such plants go pretty far.

Some plants do cross the line however.

They cross the line for me when they tend to crowd out other plant species or if they grow in abundance beyond what my animals will selectively eat.

Our farm is 225 acres with twenty-five paddocks and a wide variety of soil types. Plant habitats range from large open prairie to small, wooded lots and wet meadows. There is a great range of plants here and I encourage that.

I still own a tank sprayer that mounts on a tractor, but I quit using it years ago. I stopped using it because broadcasting kills a lot of desirable plants in addition to the targeted plant.

In recent years I have been able to get by with an occasional mowing, a hand sprayer and most important, a sharp hoe.

Mowing comes in after a pasture has been grazed and too many less desirable plants remain. Yarrow is an example of a plant that tends to take over in our open pastures. The animals eat some of it but not very much. Clipping the pasture immediately after grazing sets the yarrow back and the more desired plants get off to a good restart. With a once-a-year mowing, the desired plants get thicker and stronger, and the yarrow grows less. I prefer to use a team of horses and my ancient Minnesota sickle mower for this job. It is easy cutting with the sickle bar set high.

On small trouble spots I occasionally use a one-gallon hand sprayer. These are spots where a particular weed species has taken a solid hold and there is little danger of affecting any wanted plants.

But the best plant control tool in my opinion is a sharp hoe. Hoes are cheap to own. They are easy to operate. They seldom break down. They last a long time. Perhaps most important, a hoe does not disturb the quiet and tranquility of a fine spring morning.

I strategically place hoes around the farm where I might need them, but the most frequently used hoe is the one I keep in the bed of my pickup.

Most mornings during the grazing season I go out at sun-up to inspect the herds and pastures. When I spot a clump of weeds, I can hit them right away.

Timeliness is important. It is much easier to knock weeds back when they are young and growing fast.

Eradication is not my goal, but balance is. If you can approach the task with balance in mind it is easier to be satisfied with the results.

You can do a lot with a hoe in a half hour or so. If a particular clump is large, I spend some time on it several mornings in a row. You might be surprised at how much good you can do in just a few sessions.

I absolutely enjoy hoeing early on a beautiful spring morning. It might be wise to wear gloves to avoid blisters. Hoeing your way through a good stand of bull thistles or cockleburs can raise blisters fast. I try not to do too much at once, but enough to accomplish something and to feel good about the physical effort.

I am not opposed to tractors and chemicals but if you can do a job in a simple, rewarding way, why not? And as I mentioned above, a hoe works quietly. You can use it and still hear the meadowlarks sing and the cranes call.

Keep a sharp hoe handy and have a good spring.

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