K-STATE Research and Extension | Meadowlark District

September 20, 2024

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The Competitive Nature of Sericea Lespedeza

During the first part of the growing season, sericea lespedeza might not have seemed all that noticeable. As the season winds down and grass is shorter following haying or a season of grazing, however, it takes full advantage of growing conditions to take off.

It might seem easy to look the other way. After all, there's not *that* many plants out there, right? Surely it won't get to be a problem, will it? The competitive nature of sericea lespedeza would suggest just the opposite.

Put simply, established sericea plants can reduce or eliminate competing vegetation. It does so numerous ways, starting with restricting light to more desirable forage species. It grows tall, puts out lots of branches, and can provide a heavy shade, particularly in thick stands. It's worse on cool season grasses than warm, but neither responds well to the competition.

While not necessarily a 'competitive' plant (normal germination rates are only 10-20 percent), once it gets started, its high water requirement can actually cause a 'drought' for competing vegetation while stealing nutrients (sericea is a legume, but has low N fixation and provides little in the way of nutrient contribution) as well. As if simply tying up other nutrients and moisture wasn't enough, roots also produce allelopathic chemicals that when released inhibit seed germination and growth of various forages. Root extracts from sericea have been shown to reduce forage production of tall fescue by up to 15 percent.

Once it gets a foothold, seed production is extreme, with individual plants producing in excess of 1000 seeds per plant. It also tends to survive for long periods in the soil as well.

There's a reason sericea lespedeza is considered a statewide noxious weed. Fall can be a tricky time to control it, particularly if drought conditions exist, but if plants are growing well or you expect recently received moisture to return them to good growing conditions, consider fall treatment options. The last page of the *2024 KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide* is dedicated solely to sericea lespedeza control. Request a copy from any of our three District Offices or find it online at: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/2024-chemical-weed-control-for-field-crops-pastures-rangeland-and-noncropland_CHEMWEEDGUIDE.pdf . Local noxious weed offices are a great resource as well, providing knowledge on everything from herbicide selection to rates and timing recommendations. Make sure to visit with them if you haven't previously.