

# Horse Farm Weed Control: *Myths and Misconceptions*

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Weed management on horse farms can be a difficult and continuous problem. Because of the complexities of weed management in horse paddocks, many myths and misconceptions have developed. Below is a discussion of a few of the most common myths and how to avoid these pitfalls.

*Herbicides are toxic to horses.* It is well understood that horses are not as hardy as other pasture animals, but that does not mean they are overly sensitive to herbicides. All herbicides currently registered for use in pastures have undergone rigorous review by USEPA. The vast majority of these herbicides have no grazing restrictions for horses. Therefore, these products, when used according to the label directions, pose little if any threat to the welfare of horses. For a list of grazing restrictions, reference Table 5 in the pasture weed management guide (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wg006>).

*Herbicides are the best answer for weed management.* It is true that herbicides can be highly effective at controlling unwanted weeds. However, herbicides are a tool and may not always be the best tool for the job. Weed management should consist of a total system approach that employs proper grazing, fertility, mowing and herbicides. Any of these options when used alone will not likely provide the desired results, but partnering them together is a powerful strategy.

*Goats can help clean up weedy areas.* Goats are quite unique in that they will consume a number of weedy species that other animals do not prefer. However, like all grazing animals, goats have preferences.

Some weeds they will readily consume, others they will not. Therefore, simply buying a few goats may not improve the level of weed infestation if these species are not ones that goats prefer.

*Horse paddocks are always weedy.* Not necessarily. Excessive weed growth can be the result of over-grazing. Over-grazing a pasture will weaken the desirable grasses and reduce its ability to suppress weed growth. As a rule of thumb, a pasture can properly sustain 600-700 lb of horses per acre. Therefore, the larger your horses are, the more grazing area they will require. The first indication that over grazing is occurring will be excessive manure on the pasture and horses grazing close to the piles. A proper stocking rate and proper fertility will ensure healthy grass that helps suppress weed growth.

*Herbicides and fertilizer can restore my pasture.* It is true that weed control and fertility can jump-start grass growth. However, it is possible to do more harm than good if herbicides and fertilizer is your chosen method. Why? Some pastures have been degraded by grazing or neglect to the point that there is very little desirable grass present. If herbicide and fertilizer are used in this situation, large areas of the pasture will be bare ground (after the weeds are killed). This can lead to soil erosion or pollution as the fertilizer washes away with no plants available to utilize the nutrients. In general, if the pasture has degraded to more than 60% weeds, the best option will likely be to remove the animals and completely renovate the pasture (tillage, reseeding, fertility and lime).

