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Headline: Troublesome Pasture Plant of the Week – Blackberries/Dewberries



Hermitage, MO - Blackberry (*Rubus* sp.) is a warm season, native, perennial, woody shrub, or bramble. They are members of the Rosaceae, or rose family, which includes over 600 species and developed varieties of blackberries, raspberries, and dewberries in the *Rubus* genus. Just another sticker plant found in abandon fields, pastures, hayfields, and along roadsides which greatly reduces the grazing potential and hay quality on our farms. There are at least 16 species of blackberries found in Missouri. Here we are addressing the upright, cane-type blackberry varieties, whose canes can reach heights of over 6 feet and develop into quite a thicket if left to grow. Along with this is another plant which closely resembles blackberries but is not. Dewberries are low growing, creeping, trailing vines which may root from the nodes and may grow 10 to 15 feet in length, as they run along the ground as well as through the grass. Both are very troublesome weeds, and need to be controlled as they will spread rapidly if left unchecked.

Both plants usually have an alternating leaf pattern on a thorn covered stem and depending on the species will have a pinnately shaped three-leaflet pattern on blackberries, while dewberries have a palmately three-leaflet pattern. Sometimes you may find a five-leaflet pattern on blackberries as well. The leaflets are lance to egg-shaped around 2 to 5 inches in length as well as 1 to 2 inches wide with toothed leaf margins showing prominent venation throughout. Usually, a five petaled white flower will appear in late spring to early summer. These, if not heavily frosted on, will produce a nice edible blackberry sought after by many for pies, cobblers, and jams. An extensive root system may be found under each plant leading to its ability to survive drought conditions quite well. To identify, look closely at the canes of the plants as upright varieties of blackberry have grooves in them, while dewberries only have a round stem.

Mechanical control methods such as multiple mowing (brushhogging) and/or burnings are not recommended practices of control for these troublesome plants. Mowing can be beneficial to

remove existing top growth and allow livestock access to desirable forages. However, mowing can also leave stubs that can contribute to foot problems in livestock. In fact, mowing during the same year in which chemical controls are being applied is not recommended, as the plants need at least one full year's cane growth for the chemicals to fully take effect. Intensive stocking with browsing species, such as goats, can reduce blackberry density and open areas to sunlight to allow desirable grasses to establish. Goats have a high preference for blackberry, among many other plant species, and will aggressively consume the leaves and berries. Depending on stocking rate, goats may be able to provide significant control of blackberry within three years. Considerations for using goats for blackberry management include proper installation and maintenance of goat-proof fencing, predator control, parasite management, providing water & shelter, and adequate handling facilities. If herbicide applications are to be made, products containing metsulfuron and triclopyr are the two active ingredients that are most effective on these pests. Apply the highest rates of Cimarron, Cimarron Max, Chaparral, Pasturegard, and/or Remedy and expect only a 60% kill in the first year. You may apply any time after the blackberries have fully expanded leaves and are not stressed by drought, frost, heavy insect damage, etc. For a foliar application rate of 1 oz/100 gal. water of Cimarron or 4pts/ acre of Pasturegard with 1-2 pts/acre of Remedy Ultra combined with 1 qt/acre of 2,4, D will give good results. A tank mix of 1 pt/A of Remedy Ultra with 1 qt/A of Grazon P&D will work too.

Remember these are very hard plants to kill and will most likely take a second-year application if not three years in a row to get the job done. The best time to spray is usually late summer to early fall (late September to early October) about two weeks prior to the first killing frost.

As always please read and follow the label of any chemical you chose, wear the proper protective clothing, and be safe.

For more information on pasture plant identification, please contact your local MU Extension Agronomy Field Specialist.