

Garden Column for the Salisbury Post
Darrell Blackwelder
June 11, 2008

This spring fescue lawns have looked their absolute best and in some instances their very worst. Last season's drought has really taken its toll on many lawns. Many lawns are infested with a weed that looks much like a weak spring snow. Facelis or annual trampweed was a common problem during the droughts that occurred in 2001-02. Weak fescue lawns from the last season's drought and hot weather make the invasion very easy. This plant is actually a native of South America but has quickly become established in the United States as far west as Texas and Oklahoma and has now moved northeast into North Carolina.

The weed is a low growing, broadleaf winter annual that has already produced seed for next year's germination and will die out very soon. Trampweed produces a large amount of dandelion-like fluffy seed covering the ground near large colonies of the plant. Masses of the feathery seed can literally cover a lawn 2-3 inches deep. Many homeowners spread the seed throughout their lawns when mowing or using leaf blowers. Trampweed germinates in the fall or winter and may grow during unseasonably warm winter weather however; it normally remains dormant during the winter. As the temperature increases in the spring, growth resumes producing seed and dying out as temperatures increase.

Control of this weed is not easy. One of the major reasons the weed is so pervasive is because fescue lawns are very weak from the continual droughts and hot weather. However, there are a number of ways to help control the weed.

**The first step is to get your lawn in good shape. Facilis easily invades poorly managed lawns. Soil testing, over-seeding and proper fertilization is a must for healthy lawns and to reduce weed growth.

**Irrigate if possible during dry weather. This may be impossible for those with weak wells or water restrictions; however, fescue turf needs adequate moisture.

**Don't mow too closely. Most of the lawns infested with the weed are mowed too closely. Fescue lawns should be mowed as high as possible-3-4 inches if possible.

**Pre-emergence herbicides may be applied in September to prevent germination; however, this is usually not practical for those that over-seed weaker lawns. Post-emergence control in February and March can be obtained with repeat applications of broadleaf weed killers such as Trimec, Weed B Gon or other herbicide brands formulated to control broad-leafed weeds in fescue lawns.

Darrell Blackwelder is an agricultural agent in charge of horticulture with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in Rowan County.