

For September 3, 2013

Puncturevine – the name says it all

JoAnne Skelly

skellyj@unce.unr.edu

Puncturevine, goathead or bullhead, no matter what you call it the burr seed heads of this weed hurt when you step on them. The thorny burrs, which contain three to five seeds, can puncture shoes or even a bicycle tire. Puncturevine forms large flat mats of long stems covered in small leaves and tiny yellow flowers. The stems can grow up to 5 feet in length.

Puncturevine is not particular about its soil, growing in clay or sand, dry or moist soils. Being a summer annual, it reproduces by seed that germinates in the spring and summer of the year after they were produced. Plants grow rapidly and flowers may be produced on new seedlings as early as six weeks after germination. A plant may produce 200 to 5,000 seeds during one growing season. Seeds can remain viable in the soil for three to seven years. Because puncturevine can take over an area quite quickly, destroying habitat for native plants, this nasty annual weed is on the State's noxious weed list.

How do you control puncturevine? Get rid of the seeds! Long-term control relies upon the persistent elimination of seed stored in the soil. Keep on the lookout for the plants and get rid of them before they go to seed. Puncturevine grows too close to the ground to mow, but hand pulling, hoeing or digging work well to get rid of these weeds. However, in areas where seeds have been deposited due to lack of control in previous years, collect the old seeds by dragging an infested area with a carpet or blanket. The burrs stick to the fabric. Carefully contain and dispose of the seeds to prevent further spread. Application of 4 inches to 6 inches of mulch or light-excluding landscape cloth is also successful in reducing puncturevine populations.

You can apply preemergence herbicides in February or early March to control germinating seeds. Not all products control puncturevine, so read the label. Preemergents control most germinating seeds, including desirable species, so be careful where you apply these herbicides. For more information on preemergence herbicides or on puncturevine, go to <http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/ho/2011/fs1167.pdf>, or <http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/nr/2003/FS0334.pdf>.

The Carson City Weed Coalition, sponsored by University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, Carson Water Subconservancy District and Carson City, provides valuable information about puncturevine and other weeds on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/CCWeeds>.

