

Grassbur – *Early recognition is a key for management*



Paul A. Baumann, Ph.D.

*Professor & Extension Weed Specialist
 Texas AgriLife Extension Service
 Texas A&M University*



Grassbur (field sandbur, sandbur, etc.) is a troublesome, nasty grass weed species that affects desirable grass forage quantity and quality. Although young plants are often utilized as a grazing forage, when in the advanced stages of seed production this plant produces seed capsules that can penetrate tissues of animals causing pain and sometimes infection. More importantly, it has a very negative effect on hay quality and substantially reduces forage value. There are many different grassbur species in Texas although one of the more common is *Cenchrus spinifex* (formerly *Cenchrus incertus*). Regardless, most are easily recognized in the mature stage of growth when the pernicious seed heads become apparent. What

may interpret as the seed is actually a seed “capsule” that usually contains from 1 to 3 seeds. This capsule provides a nice environment for the seed, soaking soil moisture and

holding it until the seed has been provided the other stimulants (warm temperatures, light, day length, etc.) necessary for germination.

This is also what makes it more survivable than some other grass species in sandy soils that are more prone to dry out. We often think of the grassbur species as being warm season annual plants. However, many of these are classified as perennials which can survive from one year to the next. Although foliage may get



Grassbur can sometimes survive over the winter.

“burned” off by freezing temperatures in the fall or winter, sometimes these plants may survive and come back from the roots the following spring. These plants might be more diffi-



Grassbur seed with shattered bur.



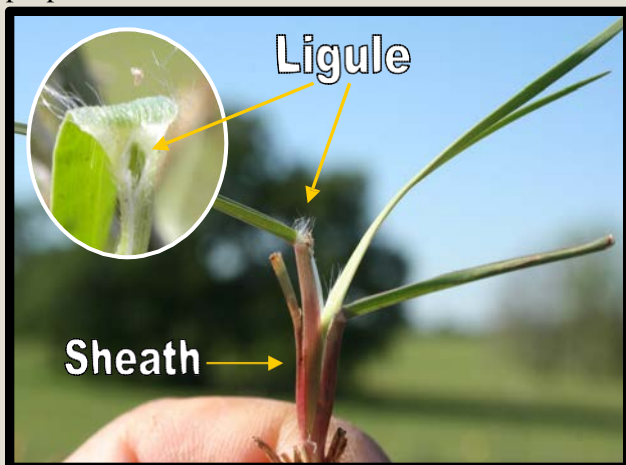
4 leaf grassbur with one tiller.

cult to eradicate, since they have already developed a substantial root system the previous year. Whenever you have a weak stand of

annual or perennial grass forage, grassbur will take advantage of this situation and flourish. Therefore, one of the best cultural control measures is to keep your forage grass stands healthy with proper management.

The most important consideration for control is recognition of grassbur in the early stages of growth. The leaves on young seedling plants are usually hairless, while the sheaths surrounding the stem may have hairs along the margins.

The sheaths will generally become pubescent (with hairs) as the plant matures. A membranous ligule is present with hairs on the fringe. The stems are somewhat flattened and often purplish colored at the base. Tillers are ex-



pressed on the plants early which add to the competitiveness of this weed. When you are doubtful about identification, you can try to dig up seedling plants and you will often find the bur attached to the seedling.

There are currently two herbicides that have a full federal label for selectively controlling grassbur. Prowl H₂O can be applied preemergence to grassbur on dormant bermudagrass at rates from 1.1 to 4.2 quarts/acre. This herbicide needs a rainfall or irrigation to activate it. Pastora herbicide can be applied postemergence to small grassbur plants (1.5 inches tall or across) at rates of 1.0 to 1.5 oz./acre. Refer to product

labels for further information. Contact your county AgriLife Extension Agent for current information on control. You must keep hay



3 leaf grassbur with seed bur attached.

fields scouted in the fall for grassbur presence so you are able to identify those areas where you might apply a preemergence, preventative herbicide in late winter or early spring.

In the spring and throughout the summer, you should again scout the fields for early detection of grassbur and get postemergence treatments



Grassbur with multiple tillers.

applied in a timely manner. No matter what the case, if you have had grassbur in the past, it is likely you will have it for years to come. Again, proper forage management will be the first step in grassbur control.

Produced by Soil & Crop Sciences
soilcrop.tamu.edu

The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is implied.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, genetic information or veteran status.