

SPEEDWELL

Why is it a weed?

It is a major competitor in arable and fodder crops, and a right pain in the butt in turf crops.

Where is it found?

Nationwide

Is it toxic?

No

Alternative uses?

Nothing. No, wait, apparently it's pretty (Junior agronomist #3's contribution).



MILTON MUNRO

This edition of the column is being written as I sit on the deck outside my house on one of the few nice days we have had this season. The only thing spoiling this perfect moment is the state of my lawn. On the few good lawn mowing days so far, I have either been away or too busy to mow. It's a jungle out there.

One thing I have noticed in my jungle is a fantastic crop of field speedwell tangling its way through the mess. The speedwell clan (the Veronica species) are a family of weeds found all over New Zealand. We have four major varieties of speedwell, although globally there are over 500 species in the Veronica family. The four types found in New Zealand are:

- scrambling speedwell
- field speedwell
- turf speedwell
- creeping speedwell

Up until recently the Veronicas were

MILTON MUNRO is a soil and plant scientist for rural supply company PGG Wrightson. He looks at common pasture weeds you'll find on your block and how to deal with them.

thought to belong to the Scrophulariaceae or figwort family. But no, genetic studies now place them in the Plantaginaceae or plantain family. Interesting eh? Well, I found it interesting.

Another interesting fact is that the good old NZ hebe is also in the plantain family and considered to be a close cousin of the speedwells. Plants are fascinating!

It is quite easy to identify speedwell in a paddock but it can be tricky to tell the different species of speedwell apart:

- both scrambling and field speedwell are annual weeds, whereas turf and creeping speedwell are perennial weeds;
- all species of speedwell can germinate in both the spring and the autumn and are prolific seeders;
- each of the varieties have slightly different leaves and sizes;
- scrambling speedwell produces the biggest plant with large, hairy, lobed leaves, stems that scramble along the ground and up other plants, and a large blue flower with white streaks;
- field speedwell looks similar to scrambling but it is smaller, less hairy and produces a very small blue flower;
- turf speedwell isn't hairy at all, its leaves aren't lobed and it produces a white flower with blue streaks;
- creeping speedwell produces small, hairy, lobed leaves, grows from a creeping stem and produces large blue flowers with white streaks.

If any of you can follow that and correctly identify the speedwells without fail, there is a prize for you!



How to control speedwell

Controlling speedwell is very easy in home gardens and very hard in crops and turf. In your garden, just pull it out - it's very easy to hand weed - but if you want a chemical option, glyphosate also works well.

Unfortunately the speedwell family is very resistant to other chemicals and there is not a lot you can use to control it. In turf you have the likes of Image, in cereals you have diflufenican and in brassicas you have... ah... mmmmm...

Note: don't get speedwell in brassicas. n