



Onehunga weed

AUTUMN IS A GOOD TIME of year to sow new pasture or lawn. By now the autumn rain should have arrived, soil temperature will be on the decline and blocks starting to once again green up.

Weed control is a significant issue when you're maintaining a property's aesthetic value. Weeds act as hosts to pests and diseases, and reduce the look and quality of lawns or pastures. But before embarking on a management programme, it pays to determine if the plant is in fact a weed.

First identify where it is growing: driveway, ditch, garden or pasture? Determine its lifecycle. Is it annual (yearly cycle), biennial (two years to complete its lifecycle) or perennial (two years plus)?

What does its growth look like? For example, does it have an underground system such as tubers or rhizomes, or an over-ground system such as stolons? Dig the plant up and have a look at the root structure to determine what mode of action is required, eg would a soil-acting, root-absorbed herbicide be best?

A common problem in New Zealand is Onehunga weed (*Soliva sessili*), the source of those annoying prickles that make your



Why is it a weed?

Competes in lawn and pastures

Where is it found?

Most of New Zealand

Is it toxic?

No, just prickly

lawn unpleasant to walk on. It's also known as field burrweed or lawnweed. It originates from South America but has since spread throughout most of Europe, several states in the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

Onehunga weed is quite often missed by the lawn mower and is difficult to eradicate manually. It is dormant through summer, germinates in autumn once the soil moisture returns, and then grows throughout winter, producing rosettes of leaves containing flower heads with lots of spined fruits. These seeds mature and drop in the middle of summer and are transported around the lawn when you walk over it. Eventually the weed begins to die, leaving spines sticking up, ready to get your bare skin.

The mature plant can measure up to 20 centimetres in diameter but remains low-lying.

How to control it

Onehunga weed has a relatively shallow root system. If it's only in a small area, it's easiest to hand weed it out of your lawn.

If it's a bigger problem, it is essential to use the full rate of recommended herbicides. This is because a strain of Onehunga weed resistant to the herbicides picloram and clopyralid has been found in Northland and Bay of Plenty.

For home gardens, a 2, 4-D + dicamba mix at full rates on the container, is recommended. This combination attacks Onehunga weed and broadleaf weeds (plant cycle-dependant) but leaves your grass alone.

Unidentifiable weeds? Feel free to take pictures (leaves, stem, flower and whole plant) and I will try to point you in the right direction about information and eradication: send to editor@nzlifestyleblock.co.nz

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