

YARROW

ACHILLEA MILLEFOLIUM

MILTON MUNRO



It was the middle of winter as I wrote this column, not exactly the best time of year to go looking for weeds. Actually it's not the best time to do anything outside unless it involves skis and mulled wine - lots of mulled wine!

But the call of work cannot be ignored, so that's why I was standing in a paddock in eastern Southland wearing six layers of clothing, up to the top of my red bands in mud in -6°C with the wind chill, teaching some farmers the finer points of regrassing.

One weed in particular was giving the farmers some serious grief and it's the topic of this month's column.

Yarrow is a very common weed found all over New Zealand, from coastal areas right up onto the sides of the mountains. It's a member of the daisy family with notable cousins being the common daisy, artichokes and sunflowers and is originally from Eastern Europe, Iran, Siberia and the Himalayas.

Yarrow was introduced to New Zealand as a component of early pasture swards. It was a common additive to original pasture mixes for a number of reasons: it had higher concentrations of certain minerals than grasses and clovers, it was highly drought resistant and stock were quite happy to graze it. In fact, on some organic farms in New Zealand, yarrow is still added to pasture.

There is an interesting story to go with its scientific name. The Achillea part refers to the mythical Greek hero Achilles. In *The Iliad* Achilles had his men use yarrow to treat their wounds. This use has remained to this day, with yarrow

Yarrow is still added to some organic farm pastures.

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.

being used to help stop bleeding.

For those of you interested, the second part of the scientific name, millefolium, simply means 'thousand leaf', a comment on the shape of the leaf but not as exciting as the Achilles bit.

Yarrow strikes very readily in the autumn and begins producing its distinctive rhizome. A rhizome is a heavily modified stem that grows underground and can produce roots and stems off it. This rhizome is what enables the plant to survive drought or mowing when other plants cannot. Yarrow produces a very distinctive leaf, feathery, a dark green colour, about 15cm in length with approximately 15-20 small leaflets growing along the sides.

If yarrow is left undisturbed for the season it will produce a dense composite flower made up of lots of little (5mm) white or sometimes pink flowers. Yarrow has a pleasant very sweet smell when crushed or cut, similar to a chrysanthemum.

CONTROLLING YARROW

Controlling it is bit different to a lot of the weeds I'll discuss in



DO YOU NEED HELP WITH A WEED PROBLEM?

I'd just like to take this moment to say giddyay to all the readers of the *NZ Lifestyle Block*, and if anyone has a request for a particular weed they would like to know more about please don't hesitate to let me know: mmunro@pggwrightson.co.nz Enjoy the start of spring everyone!

this column. In most pastoral situations yarrow doesn't cause too much harm and because it can be grazed and actually has some nutritional value, we don't really worry about it.

When it does become an issue is when it gets into your crops and home gardens. It's a hard weed to control because of the big rhizome - it can lose all of its above ground growth and still recover.

The best way to control yarrow is by using glyphosate (keep your rates up!) or spot spraying with high rates of Versatile when the plants are still small. ■

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