Lawn and Turfgrass Weeds: Wild Violet

Wild violet is a common name used for several species within the Viola genus that infest home lawns, parks, grounds, cemeteries, and other turf areas.

Figure 1. Wild violets growing in a lawn in central Pennsylvania. Photo by Peter Landschoot, Penn State

This weed grows well in moist, fertile soils and can persist in full sun and shaded areas. Wild violet (*Viola* spp.) is an aggressive weed, spreading into non-infested areas via underground stems called rhizomes.

Life cycle

Wild violet is a member of the violet family (Violaceae) and has a perennial life cycle. Plants form thick, branching rhizomes that give rise to new plants and serve as food storage and overwintering structures. Leaves and stems emerge from growing points on rhizomes in early spring, and new plants continue to develop throughout the growing season. Flowers are produced during April and May and are eventually replaced by seed-containing fruit capsules. Seeds germinate under cool, moist conditions and give rise to new plants.

Figure 2. Thick, branching rhizomes of wild violet. Photo by Peter Landschoot, Penn State

Identification

Wild violet plants produce low growing rosettes of heart-shaped leaves with serrated margins. Leaves are hairless with glossy surfaces and can extend up to 3.5 inches in length. Flowers can be purple, violet, blue, or white, and are approximately 1/2 to 3/4 inch across. Flowers develop on stalks that arise from growing points at the base of plants. Each flower has five petals, with two of the petals producing white hairs at the base.

Figure 3. Rosette of heart-shaped leaves of wild violet originating from a subsurface crown. Photo by Peter Landschoot, Penn State

Figure 4. Flowers of wild violet. Flowers have five petals that can take on a variety of colors. Photo by Peter Landschoot, Penn State

Management and control

Wild violet is one of the most difficult weeds to control in lawns. Removal by hand is not effective unless rhizomes are excavated from the soil. Improving turf density through fertilization, regular mowing, and use of turfgrasses well-adapted to site conditions will help to slow the spread of this weed, but may not provide effective suppression once wild violet is established.

Herbicides containing triclopyr provide the best control of wild violet species; however, repeat application over the course of the growing season and over multiple years may be needed for effective control. Reasons for poor control of wild violet with postemergence herbicides include a thick, waxy cuticle that interferes herbicide uptake and its strong recuperative potential due to robust underground rhizomes. Preemergence herbicides do not provide suppression or control of wild violet.

Postemergence herbicide products labeled for control of wild violet.

Active ingredients	Product name(s)*
2,4-D, fluroxypyr, triclopyr, and flumioxazin	Sure Power (ester formulation)
2,4-D, MCPP, dicamba	Super Trimec, Lesco Three-Way Ester II (ester formulations)
2,4-D, MCPP, dicamba, and carfentrazone-ethyl	SpeedZone
2,4-D, quinclorac, and dicamba	Quincept, 2DQ Herbicide
2,4-D and triclopyr	Chaser (ester formulation)
2,4-D and triclopyr	Chaser 2 Amine, Turflon II Amine
2,4-D, triclopyr, dicamba, and pyraflufen-ethyl	4-Speed XT (ester formulation)
2,4-D, triclopyr, dicamba, and sulfentrazone	Foundation
2,4-D, triclopyr, fluroxypyr, and sulfentrazone	Momentum 4-Score
carfentrazone-ethyl and quinclorac	SquareOne
fluroxypyr and triclopyr	Tailspin
MCPA, fluroxypyr, and triclopyr	Battleship III
MCPA, MCPP, dicamba, and carfentrazone-ethyl	PowerZone
MCPA, triclopyr, and dicamba	Cool Power (ester formulation)
MCPA, triclopyr, and dicamba	Eliminate
mesotrione	Tenacity
quinclorac	Drive XLR8, Quinclorac 1.5 L, Quinclorac 75 DF
quinclorac and prodiamine	Cavalcade PQ
quinclorac, sulfentrazone, 2,4-D, and dicamba	Q4 Plus
sulfentrazone	Dismiss, Surepyc
sulfentrazone and carfentrazone-ethyl	Dismiss NXT
sulfentrazone and quinclorac	Solitare, Solitare WSL
triclopyr	Turflon Ester Ultra (ester formulation)
triclopyr and clopyralid	Confront, 2-D**

triclopyr and sulfentrazone	Tzone SE

*Follow label precautionary statements, restrictions, and directions regarding tolerant turfgrass species, rates, and timing of applications.

**Clopyralid-containing products should not be used on residential lawns but can be used for treating weeds in non-residential turf.

References

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Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research and extension programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Code: ART-5885