

Get a head start on weeds at first plant clinic for 2008

The first step in controlling weeds is to identify the weeds you're wanting to control. The majority of weeds that are dominant in our lawns, landscapes and gardens now are winter annuals. They are the weeds that stand out in late winter and early spring. Most have flowers now. It may appear that these weeds suddenly came from nowhere. But in fact they started their lives way back in late fall or early winter.

During this transition time from winter to spring, these very visible winter annual weeds are approaching the end of their lives. At the same time, many summer annual weeds are just getting started. Understanding this concept is critical when it comes to controlling annual weeds.

Winter annual weeds such as chickweed, henbit and wild geranium have completed about 80% of their lifetime by now. They've produced hundreds if not thousands of seeds.

Most people wait too late to ask about controlling annual weeds. But you can get a jump start in weed control by having your weeds identified at our first plant clinic for 2008.

The plant clinic will be held Wednesday, March 26 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Fort Walton Beach at the Okaloosa County Extension Service building, 127 W. Hollywood Blvd.

The plant clinic is designed to provide a place and time for people to bring in samples of plants for diagnosis, including weeds for identification.

To participate, bring a sample of the weed, plant, insect, etc., to the clinic. Bring a fresh sample. This may include a plant stem with several leaves, a 4-inch square of grass with roots attached, etc. You may also bring a sample of your soil for pH testing.

Here's how to collect a soil sample.

Collect a composite soil sample by removing subsamples from ten to fifteen small holes dug throughout the sample area (e.g. the front yard). To obtain the subsamples, carefully pull back mulch, grass or ground covers to expose bare soil. With a hand trowel or shovel, dig small holes six inches deep and then remove a one inch thick by six inch deep slice of soil. Combine and mix the subsamples in a clean plastic bucket. Place about two cups of this mixture in a plastic bag or small throwaway plastic container. Close the container. If the soil is wet, let it air dry by spreading it out on newspaper before putting it in the container. Make sure to attach a slip of paper with your name, phone number and where the sample was taken (e.g. lawn, vegetable garden, flowerbed, etc.).

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, March 11, 2008