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Don't Bring Home-Garden Problems

Folks all over the Pee Dee are spreading terrible gardening problems. For many years a weed, Florida Betony, was our worst garden epidemic. Even if it is expensive and time consuming, we have some chemical controls for Florida Betony. However, now we are having epidemics of some gardening problems for which there are no controls.

First of all, ground pearls have devastated many lawns all over the Pee Dee. Ground pearls are scale like insects that feed on the roots of grass. So far the only control we have come up with is to keep your grass as healthy as possible. This may allow you to have some grass for a short period of time. One Lake City resident was happy when I told her the problem because she had tried everything to grow grass in her yard and only had weeds. Also, since Bermuda grass is more vigorous than Centipede it may live a little longer before succumbing to ground pearls.

Next, Virginia buttonweed is spreading like wildfire. Virginia buttonweed is a low growing, spreading, perennial herb with hairy branched stems. It spreads by seed, roots or stem fragments. In fact if you get any part of the plant in your yard, you have Virginia buttonweed for which we know of no controls. However, multiple applications of a Trimec type herbicide will suppress it's spread.

Next, many types of nematodes, which are microscopic eel-like worms, are making it difficult to grow many types of plants, especially lawns. Some 25 different nematodes are considered economic pests in S.C. Ring nematodes hurt centipede grass. However, if you have sting nematode all types of grass are harmed. No chemical nematicides are labeled for use in the home lawn. However, keeping the grass maintained properly and solarizing the soil by covering with clear plastic to allow the soil pasteurize are your best ways to combat nematode problems.

Finally, there is no final answer. Research and Extension Services must continue to combat such epidemic problems and new problems which will continue to arise. However, the best thing you can do at present is not to bring these and other problems into your yard. I never bring topsoil into my yard, there is no telling what problems it might contain. I only bring in pure washed mortar sand. It is mostly sterile and without most problems. Even be careful when bringing sod or plants into a yard. I have seen some sod with more weeds than the preferred grass. When moving plants from other yards always remove all soil and bare root the plants. The moral of the story is “Never bring soil from elsewhere into your yard.”

Also, to learn the specifics on all types of gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby St. You may also visit our Home & Garden Information Center through our web site at www.clemson.edu/florence. I may be contacted through our web site, amelton@clemson.edu, or 661-4800.