Yes Virginia, with diligence you can control Virginia buttonweed

Growing among your grass blades may be a weed that is quickly spreading and taking hold. Virginia buttonweed is an aggressive weed that forms a dense mat that can quickly cover large areas of the lawn.

Known scientifically as *Diodia virginiana*, this is one of the most difficult-to-control weeds in southern lawns. Virginia buttonweed is found throughout the southeastern states and is particularly well adapted to low, wet areas.

This deep-rooted weed is a warm-season perennial, meaning that it can return each spring from its root system. In addition, it can spread by seeds and vegetatively from any living portion of the plant.

**Identify the culprit**
Virginia buttonweed is easy to confuse with other more easily-controlled lawn weeds. So, correct identification is important. Virginia buttonweed leaves are opposite each other on the stem. The leaves themselves are lance-shaped and without a leaf stalk. Sometimes the leaves have a mottled, yellow appearance due to a virus that commonly infects the foliage. Leaves also frequently develop a purplish color.

A unique characteristic of Virginia buttonweed is that it produces both above and below-ground flowers that self-pollinate. The above-ground flowers are white and star-shaped with four petals. The four petal flower distinguishes it from other similar weeds.

Fruit, containing two seeds, are green, elliptically shaped, hairy and ridged. Above-ground fruit float, allowing them to be transported with surface water to other areas.

**Control strategies**

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Because of its persistent nature, there are no effective preemergence herbicides. Therefore, control strategies must focus on prevention and early detection.

To prevent introduction, be sure that contaminated mower clippings don’t find their way into your lawn. Also be sure to thoroughly inspect all new sod prior to planting.

Mowing does not control this weed since it can tolerate mowing heights as low as one-half inch. If any portion of the weed is cut and lands on a new spot, it has the ability to produce a new plant.

Scout your lawn regularly looking for this mat-forming weed. It is easier to detect once it starts flowering. When you see it, flag that area so that you can come back to it. Leave your flag in that location because several treatments may be required.

Individual plants or small infestations can be removed by hand. Be sure to remove as much of the root as possible and properly dispose of all plant fragments. Continually examine the area during the summer and remove any newly emerged plants. Diligence can ensure complete eradication. Check the area again the next summer too. If any stem fragments or rhizomes are left behind, they can produce a new, viable plant.

Postemergence herbicides are usually required to control this weed. Instead of treating the entire lawn, remember to spot treat only. Products containing the herbicide carfentrazone are recommended and can be used on all the warm-season turf. Carfentrazone can be found in Fertilome Weed Free Zone or Ortho® Weed-B-Gon Max®. Be sure to read and follow label directions. Since these products cannot be used once temperatures reach 90 degrees F, it’s important to treat as early in the season as possible. For other chemical recommendations, refer to the University of Florida publication at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep386.

Virginia buttonweed control in established turf can be difficult due to the plant’s prostrate growth habit, extensive root system, aggressive growth and ability to reproduce vegetatively. Sequential applications of postemergence herbicides will be required to provide effective control.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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