

Florida Betony Strikes Again

by Shawn Jadrnicek

If you have Florida Betony in your landscape you're not alone. This plant has invaded the lowcountry and puts up a good fight when you try to get rid of it. Florida betony is easily recognized by the white segmented tubers that look like a rattlesnake's rattle leading to another common name "rattlesnake weed." Florida betony is a cool-season perennial that emerges from seeds and tubers during the cool, moist months of fall. It grows vigorously in the fall and will stay green through the winter unless temperatures become very cold, in which case, it dies back temporarily. Vigorous growth resumes in early spring and flowering occurs from late spring to early summer. At the onset of high summer temperatures, growth stops and the plant becomes nearly dormant.

There are several broadleaf herbicides available to homeowners that contain 2, 4-D, MCPP, and dicamba. Examples include Ortho Weed B Gon Weed Killer for Lawns Concentrate and Trimec Southern. These products can be used to spot treat Florida betony and can be used in fescue, Bermuda, and zoysia lawns. Before applying to centipede and St. Augustine lawns, carefully check the product label. Because of their sensitivity to 2, 4-D, it's normally recommended to apply at reduced rates. Also, injury can occur if applied to centipede or St. Augustine during green-up, the transition between the dormant state and active growth in spring. Broadleaf herbicides, including the two mentioned above, will harm ornamental plants. Avoid spraying desirable plants and avoid spraying over the root zone. Desirable plants can be protected from herbicide drift by not spraying in windy conditions, by keeping the spray nozzle close to the ground, and by using low pressure. Lastly, do not apply to turf when temperatures are above 85 °F.

Herbicides containing atrazine are labeled for use on St. Augustine and centipede lawns and will help control florida betony. Examples of products include Ortho Weed B Gon Spot Weed Killer for St. Augustine Lawns and Hi-Yield Atrazine Weed Killer. It is recommended to apply atrazine in fall and to re-apply in mid-winter to early spring. With any product, it may take 2 years to completely kill Florida betony. Products containing atrazine should not be applied during green-up and should not be applied over the root zone of desirable plants. Also, because atrazine affects the growth of emerging seedlings, areas of turf treated with atrazine cannot be overseeded for six months.

In landscape beds Florida betony can be controlled using a selective herbicide called dichlobenil (casaron). Dichlobenil is safe to use around selected ornamental plants so it's important to follow label directions. Glyphosate (Roundup) a non-selective herbicide will also kill back Florida betony as well as any plant it contacts.

If chemical cocktails aren't your cup of tea, some people welcome Florida betony as a green winter addition to the lawn and landscape. The white tubers are also edible and taste like a mild radish.

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