Several species of *Rubus*, a genus of often prickly shrubs including blackberry and dewberry, are problems in pastures and hayfields across Alabama. These briar patches are difficult to control, and their presence reduces grazing and hay quality. They can also injure livestock. Dewberry and blackberry are closely related, but they are very different in growth habits and physical characteristics. More important to producers, however, is that dewberry is much more difficult to control than blackberry, especially in hayfields.

**Q:** How can I quickly tell dewberry from blackberry?

From a distance, they can be easily confused. But they are relatively easy to distinguish upon close examination. Dewberry exhibits a low, vine-like, trailing growth habit that forms mats that are rarely taller than two feet above the ground. This is why dewberry is sometimes called trailing blackberry. Blackberry typically has an upright rambling growth habit, which can form impenetrable thickets that are often four to six feet tall. Stems of dewberry have slender thorns and numerous red hairs, while upright blackberry stems have few to no hairs and numerous hard, broad-based thorns. Although the flowers produced by both may look similar, dewberry tends to flower about one to two months earlier in the spring than blackberry.

**Q:** Why are blackberry and dewberry so abundant in Alabama?

Several native species of blackberry and dewberry found in Alabama are well-adapted to grow in grasslands, forest edges, and open disturbed areas. *Rubus* species produce attractive fruits that are consumed by many species of birds and wildlife, and the seeds are subsequently widely dispersed. Pastures create ideal

Dewberry stems (top) have slender thorns and numerous red hairs while most species of blackberry (bottom) have hard, broad-based thorns and few to no hairs.

Dewberry is a frequent problem in pastures and hayfields. The trailing growth habit quickly begins to smother forage species.
conditions for Rubus species as cattle generally avoid them if possible. Likewise, hayfields also create conditions that especially favor low growing vine-like plants, such as dewberry, that can tolerate repeated cutting.

**Q:** What are the best herbicide options for blackberry and dewberry control?

Only a few herbicide active ingredients are effective for blackberry and dewberry control, and their use is based on the forage grasses being grown. The most effective herbicide active ingredient for dewberry control is metsulfuron, while blackberry is effectively controlled by triclopyr, metsulfuron, and fluroxypyr. Metsulfuron is found in products such as Chaparral, Cimarron Plus, and some generic products that can be safely used on established bermudagrass pastures and hayfields. However, metsulfuron will kill ‘Pensacola’ bahiagrass and will injure or kill tall fescue at the rates needed for dewberry control. Therefore, if you want to keep ‘Pensacola’ bahiagrass or tall fescue, do not use any product with metsulfuron for dewberry control. Triclopyr is found in products such as Remedy Ultra, Pasturegard, and some generics and is safe to use on established cool- and warm-season forage grasses. Fluroxypyr is found in products such as Pasturegard and Surmount and is also safe on warm- and cool- season forage grasses.

However, if it is not possible to wait until fall, it is critical to allow the leaves to fully expand in the spring before treatment. In hayfields, wait until the stems are completely dessicated after treatment before hay cutting. This may mean you need to cut around treated patches for one to two months. You can also apply in the fall after last cutting if you have good dewberry growth. However, to get sufficient growth, you may need to mow around dewberry patches over the summer to get enough regrowth by early fall.

Dewberry patches often exhibit a dark reddish color in the winter, which makes them readily stand out in pastures and hayfields.

**Q:** If I can use metsulfuron, what are my best options?

Apply Chaparral at 3 to 3.3 ounces per acre OR apply Cimarron Plus at 0.625 to 1.2 ounces per acre. With either product, add a nonionic surfactant at 0.25 percent v/v (1 quart per 100 gallons spray mix). While applications can be made anytime from spring until fall, best results have been obtained with fall treatment.

**Q:** I have bahiagrass or tall fescue and do not want to use metsulfuron. Now what are my best options?

Apply Pasturegard HL at 1.5 to 2 pints per acre with a nonionic surfactant at 0.25 percent v/v OR Remedy Ultra at 2 pints per acre OR Surmount at 4 pints per acre with a nonionic surfactant at 0.25 percent v/v. Surmount is a RESTRICTED USE PESTICIDE. Pasturegard, Surmount, and Remedy are safe on bermudagrass, bahiagrass, and tall fescue. Make applications when the leaves are fully expanded and the foliage is dark green. Wait until the stems are completely dessicated before cutting the treated area. This may mean you need to cut around treated patches.
for a month or two. You can also apply in the fall after last cutting if you have good dewberry or blackberry regrowth. To get enough regrowth, you may need to mow around dewberry patches over the summer to be ready to treat by fall. Note that Pasturegard, Remedy Ultra, and Surmount may be less effective if mowing has occurred within a year prior to treatment for either species. Remedy Ultra has also been shown to provide variable dewberry control.

Q: Can you clarify the issue with mowing or clipping and herbicide treatment?

First, mowing or hay cutting alone WILL NOT control dewberry or blackberry. It may temporarily reduce the size or top growth of these weeds, but they will rapidly recover. Second, mowing can remove old dead stems and leaves that may interfere with herbicide deposition and create conditions that may make herbicide application to new uniform regrowth easier. However, when mowing first, best control results have been observed when the herbicide application is made in the following year, especially for Pasturegard, Remedy Ultra, and Surmount. For example, you can mow in the summer the first year and then spray the following summer when shoots have regrown. Metsulfuron seems less sensitive to this mowing issue, which is why it is a better choice in hayfields if it can be used.

Q: What about dicamba + 2,4-D (Weedmaster) or 2,4-D alone?

Research has shown these products do not provide consistent control of dewberry and blackberry. These products generally will control top growth, but plants recover very quickly from the roots.

Q: What about soil pH and fertility?

Take a soil test and follow the recommendations for your forage grasses to keep them as healthy as possible. Blackberry and dewberry species can tolerate lower pH and lower fertility than most forage grasses can tolerate and will likely be more competitive when pH and fertility are low.

Q: What about cattle grazing before or after spraying?

Cattle may lightly graze the tips of many Rubus species, but they generally avoid them due to the thorny growth. As long as you avoid intensive mob grazing that may trample blackberry or dewberry...
before herbicide treatment, there is no problem with cattle grazing before any of these herbicide treatments. There are no grazing restrictions for beef cattle for any herbicide discussed in this publication. However, mob grazing that may result in trampling of blackberry or dewberry should be avoided until stems are completely dessicated.

Q: I have heard that goats can control blackberry. Will they control dewberry too?

Goats are very effective in controlling blackberry and many other woody plants including kudzu, poison ivy, and mimosa. Goats have not been frequently used in Alabama for weed control, especially in hayfields. Systems approaches for dewberry weed control in hayfields with goats have yet to be developed.

Q: Are there any other important considerations?

Blackberry or dewberry control is expensive, so get the most out of each treatment. Make sure the sprayer is properly calibrated, and always read and follow directions on the herbicide label for any product you use. Finally, with any herbicide approach, remember that the problem didn’t develop overnight and cannot be solved with one treatment. You will likely need to retreat for several years to get on top of the problem. Similar to many other pasture weeds, both blackberry and dewberry species may form persistent seed banks in the soil, and the roots are difficult to completely kill with any management approach. However, with persistence, these weeds can be effectively managed.