

What's Working for Nova Scotia Growers:

Managing Weeds in Christmas Trees

Weed control remains one of the biggest challenges for Christmas tree growers in Nova Scotia. Weeds compete with young trees for sunlight, water, and nutrients—inhibiting growth, attracting pests, and making fieldwork like pruning and harvesting more difficult. If not managed properly, they can severely affect tree health, form, and market value.

To tackle this issue, many growers are combining different strategies that work

best for their land and conditions. Some of the most troublesome species include Canada thistle, bracken fern, wild blackberry, golden rod, multiflora rose, juniper, false buckwheat, creeping blackberry, vetch and poison ivy. Each presents unique problems, from deep root systems to disease risk and pest sheltering.

Chemical tools such as pre-emergence herbicides like pendimethalin and hexazinone have been effective when applied at the right time and with proper soil moisture. Post-emergent herbicides like glyphosate and clopyralid are commonly used as well but must be handled carefully

to avoid damaging the trees. Post-emergent herbicides can be used effectively as a spot treatment throughout Christmas tree lots.

Glyphosate can be an effective weed control product in Christmas tree fields, but it must be used with care. Apply only when trees are fully dormant—typically early spring or late fall—to avoid damaging foliage of Christmas trees. Use shielded or directed sprayers to target weeds at ground level, and avoid contact with needles, buds, or bark. It's especially important to keep glyphosate away from newly planted or young trees, which are



Figure 1. Pearly Everlasting



Figure 2. Bracken Fern



Figure 3. False Buckwheat



Figures 4, 5. Golden Rod. Left and right



Figure 6. Juniper

particularly sensitive. Always follow label instructions, apply at recommended rates, and consider combining with mowing or mulching to reduce herbicide use. When used responsibly, glyphosate can support reduced weed pressure, and healthier trees without unnecessary risk.

Clopyralid is a selective herbicide that can be useful for controlling broadleaf weeds in Christmas tree fields, particularly thistles, goldenrods, and asters. It is generally safe on established conifers when applied correctly, but timing and application methods are critical. Avoid spraying during active tree growth or bud break to reduce the risk of injury. Use directed or shielded sprayers to minimize drift and prevent contact with sensitive foliage.

Newly planted or stressed trees may be more susceptible, therefore it is best to avoid broadcast applications unless clearly labeled as safe. Always follow

label directions, observe re-entry intervals, and rotate herbicides to manage resistance. When applied thoughtfully, clopyralid can improve weed control while protecting tree health. Pendimethalin is a pre-emergent herbicide that prevents weed seed germination. Apply it to clean, weed-free soil before weeds emerge, ideally in early spring. Activation with water (rain or irrigation) is essential. Avoid disturbing the soil after application. Do not apply near newly planted seedlings or allow spray to contact tree foliage or bark. When used properly, pendimethalin provides reliable control of annual grasses and broadleaf weeds.

Hexazinone is a broad-spectrum, soil-active herbicide commonly used for pre-emergent weed control in Christmas tree plantations. It is effective against a wide range of annual and perennial weeds, including grasses and broadleaves. Apply only to established trees,

as hexazinone can leach into the root zone and cause damage to young or shallow-rooted seedlings. Use caution on sandy or coarse-textured soils, where movement through the soil profile is more likely. Applications are typically made in early spring before weed emergence.

The key to success is staying proactive and adapting strategies to fit the specific needs of each site. With the right approach, growers can maintain healthier fields, improve tree quality, and run more efficient and sustainable operations.

Below are a couple helpful resources:

Health Canada-Pesticide Search Label: <https://pr-rp.hc-sc.gc.ca/lr-re/index-eng.php>

Nova Scotia Guide to Pest Management in Christmas Trees: bit.ly/4jKoM2X