

Weed focus: Purple deadnettle

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Also known as red deadnettle and purple archangel, purple deadnettle (*Lamium purpureum*) is a winter annual weed native to Europe and Asia. It is a member of the mint family and has the square stem characteristic of this plant family. It is named for its similar appearance to small stinging nettle plants, but it doesn't sting and therefore is "dead". Purple deadnettle looks similar to henbit (photos at right), but there are distinguishing characteristics. The leaves of purple deadnettle are covered with fine hairs (photo, below) while those of henbit are not. They are



green at the bottom of the plant and gain a purple tint at the top of the plant. They are ovate, have wavy edges, and each has a stalk. The flowers of purple deadnettle are pink to reddish purple and are tubular (photo, left).

Purple deadnettle takes advantage of disturbed soil and open spaces. It prefers moist, fertile soil, and light shade to full sun. It does not tolerate summer heat and disappears as temperatures rise. Where there is little competition, it can form dense mats. It is an important early spring food source for pollinators.

The young leaves of purple deadnettle are edible, despite its toxic-sounding name. They can be used in salads and stir-fry. Leaves can be used to make tea; however, if consumed in excess, this can have a laxative effect. Essential oil produced from the plant contains germacrene D, which has antimicrobial and insecticidal qualities. It poses no danger to livestock and in fact, is quite nutritious.

Controlling purple deadnettle in pastures: Unless there is danger of this plant taking over your pasture or hay field, there may be little need to apply any control since it disappears as temperatures increase and since it is nutritious and non-toxic. Deadnettle is easily controlled with herbicides. Products that contain metsulfuron can be used post-emergence without too much risk to surrounding plants. Application should be made in the fall, after the plants have germinated and before they get too large. Air temperatures should be above 50° F. Herbicides

containing 2,4-D and dicamba are also effective. Pre-emergent herbicides can help control deadnettle; however, it is important to remember that these chemicals may have a detrimental effect if you are trying to overseed to thicken a pasture stand or to add diversity to a pasture.

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