MARTY MORGAN, COOKE COUNTY AG AGENT
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE-

What is this Alien stuff in my pasture?

This parasitic annual plant named Dodder, which infests many crops, ornamentals, native plants, and weeds, is found worldwide and there are over 150 species, although dodder is most prevalent in the Americas. Dodder species vary in the number of different host species they can infect. Some species are in rather restricted sites such as salty marshes, flats, and ponds on just a few host plant species. Others are found on many crop and weed species including alfalfa, melons, tomato, field bindweed, lambsquarters, ragweed and pigweed. Japanese dodder has recently been found in California attacking and covering ornamental shrubs and fruit trees, with a preference toward citrus. However, Japanese dodder also can parasitize annuals, perennials, and native trees such as oaks and willows. Dodder has slender, twining or threadlike stems that vary from pale green to yellow or bright orange; the bright stems can be readily seen against the foliage of the host plants. Native dodder can be leafless or have tiny, scalelike, triangular leaves. The bell-shaped flowers are cream colored and they usually occur in clusters but occasionally are borne singly. Each flower produces a seed capsule with 2 to 3 seeds. Seeds have rough coats and seedlings are yellowish, threadlike, rootless, leafless stems. Although dodder is capable of limited photosynthesis, it obtains nearly all of its energy from the host plant. A dodder seedling can survive several days without a host, but if it doesn't come into contact with one within 5 to 10 days, the seedling will die. Dodder stems that have attached to a host plant have been known to survive for several days after being detached from the host plant. As dodder plants grow, they continually reattach to the host. When other suitable hosts are nearby, dodder shoots spread from host plant to host plant, often forming a dense mat of intertwined stems. Shaded areas greatly reduce twining and attachment.

Where dodder has been a persistent problem in certain commercial agricultural fields or in landscapes, apply preemergent herbicides (e.g., trifluralin) before dodder seed germinates; where practical, follow up with close mowing, burning, or spot removal of parasitized host plants to control dodder plants that escaped the herbicide application. For post emergent control, Pelargonic acid (Scythe) is effective, it also kills any plant tissue it contacts; consequently good coverage and careful spraying are important, so desirable plants aren't damaged.

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