



Paddock Spraying & Maintenance - Spring 2021

Paddock Spraying & Covid 19

In the midst of the current turmoil I just wanted to let you know that we are able to continue to carry out paddock spraying operations as normal this season. Current Government regulations do not prohibit this. Forestry is classed as an essential business and spraying to control weeds such as Ragwort is an animal welfare operation. Spraying is, by its nature, socially distanced and we wear full PPE! If you are concerned about any form of contact you can just leave us a map and we will carry out the work without you having to be there. If you want your paddocks treated this season please just ring or email and we will book you in

Inspection

Use your currently allowed one hour exercise allowance wisely. Get out and walk over **all** your paddocks not just the one nearest the stables! Have a good look at what's growing, does the grass look healthy, are there lots of small weeds and ragwort rosettes? Is there moss present, bare patches, bumpy ground, dead thatch? You are asking a lot from your paddocks so you need to give them some TLC to keep them in good shape.

Jobs For The Spring

It has been a wet and cold winter which may well mean your grass is looking a little sorry for itself and paddocks may well be poached. The first job this season will be to roll them as soon as ground conditions permit. You can test this by walking over your paddocks and trying to dig your heel in. You want to have just a bit of 'give'. If your heel won't dig in at all the ground is too hard and you may have to wait for rain. If your heel sinks in and mud sticks to it then it is too wet and you are likely to cause more damage by rolling. Beware some ground can go from too soft to too hard within a few days so you need to act immediately when conditions are correct. You will need a decent weight roller to do a meaningful job. A little three foot roller you use on your lawn is unlikely to be much use on hoof prints! Although most farmers and agricultural contractors will have a heavy roller you cannot always rely on them being available when you need them so it will pay to invest in your own. You should be able to tow these behind a decent 4 x 4 or small tractor.

Grass Quality & fertilising

During the spring and summer you are relying on your grass to provide a wide range of vitamins, nutrients and trace elements to your horse. Poor soil, bad drainage and overgrazing can all affect grass quality. We have heard from clients about some potentially serious health issues that their horses have suffered from that have arisen from poor grass quality and a lack of essential nutrients. This has been costly in terms of vets bills. In the short term this can be corrected by feeding supplements once the problem is identified but a longer term solution is improving the grass. The first step is to get a good soil analysis done. The kits you can get in a garden centre are not good enough. Get a specialist in, they will be cheaper in the long run than a vet! If you send us the report we will get our agronomist to advise on the solution. This might be the application of lime or the use of a foliar feed to replace missing trace elements such as boron, copper or magnesium. We can easily and quickly apply these as a spray.

Sometimes the solution may be even simpler. If you are on sandy ground then the soil may just need some more organic matter. Many stables have a problem getting rid of muck. Why get rid of it when an application each year of well rotted manure is an excellent and free source of fertiliser and organic matter! Ideally you will need to rest these paddocks for a few weeks afterwards to let the soil and grass benefit from the application. Alternatively we can apply a general purpose liquid fertiliser. If you don't like synthetic fertilisers then we can use more organic products such as seaweed extract. Work out a paddock rotation and stick to it!

Ragwort

It is a **legal** requirement for landowners to stop the spread of Ragwort on to land they do not own. We are sure everyone knows about the dangers from Ragwort. Less than 2lb green weight will kill a horse. Each plant can produce 150 000 seeds and they can lie dormant for 20-30 years! The poison is cumulative and there is no cure. It can however be controlled very effectively with herbicides. Timing is important as once it begins to get above knee height the herbicides become less effective and are almost useless when it starts flowering. It does have a two year cycle so spraying this season should also control a lot of next years plants as well. The best time to spray is late April to early June. Ragwort is a tough plant and very dense infestations may require a second application. **You will not get rid of it all in one year.** Have you been pulling the Ragwort for years? Not only is this time consuming but it can actually turn the plant into a perennial, so defeating the object of the exercise! Why not let us do the hard work and allow you to get on with looking after the horses. The herbicides we use will also get rid of most of the other paddock weeds. There are products you can apply yourself by hand like Barrier H but it is expensive and time consuming if you have more than a few plants to treat and it will also kill your grass! A detailed information sheet about Ragwort as well as other noxious weeds such as Japanese Knot-weed and Giant Hogweed can be found on our website.

Pesticides and The Law

You are probably aware that the rules about buying and using pesticides have tightened up considerably in the last 5 years. You may have found that you are no longer able to buy pesticide yourself unless you have the correct certification. In addition since November 2016 all mechanical spraying equipment needs to have been tested under the National Sprayer Testing Scheme (NSTS) and then re-tested every three years. That old sprayer you have used for many years may no longer be legal! Have you got the right certificates? There are no longer any grandfathers rights. It is illegal to apply pesticide without the correct certificates

Spraying Near Water

If you have any spraying that needs to be carried out near streams or rivers, for example, to eliminate Giant Hogweed or Japanese Knotweed, we can apply for the relevant licence from the Environment Agency on your behalf.

Spraying near water (within 1m from the top of the bank if using a knapsack or 5m if using a boom sprayer) without a licence is illegal and can lead to big fines. Let us make sure you are fully compliant.

Will Spraying Work?

Yes! We will apply the best herbicide for your weed problem and apply it accurately taking into account weed & weather conditions. We are confident in our ability to get it right and **we guarantee to re-spray free of charge if the herbicide does not work.** However please bear in mind that some weeds, especially Ragwort, can be difficult to eradicate in one go, especially if it is a very dense infestation. You will not kill it all in one go and sometimes further applications will be necessary until the seed bank is exhausted. We apply the herbicide at the maximum rate we are legally allowed to, applying too much can kill the grass as well! It will only kill growing weeds and has no effect on seeds in the soil.

Which Herbicide?

For paddocks where Ragwort is a problem then a herbicide containing 2,4-D is essential. We use a mix of three different herbicides, recommended by our agronomist, to give broad spectrum weed control of a wide range of commonly found paddock weeds including ragwort dock, nettle, thistle and creeping buttercup. We have used this mix for several seasons and have had excellent results. It needs to be applied to actively growing weeds so we recommend delaying treatment until at least late April. Other specific weeds may need a different herbicide. Give us a call if you have a specific weed problem.

Once sprayed you will need to keep horses off the paddock for at least 14 days, so you may need to consider rotating them. We are happy to return for a second application if necessary.

How long do I need to keep the animals off?

Our most frequently asked question! With the pesticide we use there is a statutory 14 day exclusion from grazing or until poisonous vegetation has become unpalatable to grazing animals. This is because Ragwort often takes longer than 14 days to die and it is just as poisonous dead as it is alive. As it dies it becomes less bitter so the risk of a animal accidentally eating it increases. The risk is to grazing animals only, other animals including cats and dogs will be unaffected by walking across treated paddocks even a short time after treatment once it is dry. We will happily spray in two visits to help you manage your grazing

Machinery

We use a John Deere Gator UTV with a purpose built state-of-the-art computer controlled spraying system to ensure accurate and efficient coverage. It has several major advantages over tractors having very low ground pressure, less than the human foot, so we can get onto and spray areas early in the season without the risk of causing ground damage. We can get through gates as narrow as 7ft so we can spray areas you may have thought were inaccessible. Its size makes it easy to tow and we are happy to travel and spray small areas. With a 6m boom we can also spray larger paddocks quickly and economically. The computer measures the area we spray. So if you don't know how big your field is – we can tell you. The use of low drift nozzles means there is no problem having animals in the paddock next to the ones we are spraying.



Costs £££

We try to be as competitive as possible and have managed to hold the cost of spraying the same for the fifth year in a row by investing in new equipment. For small acreages we charge **£55.00 inclusive** per acre. There are economies of scale and we are pleased to quote for larger areas over 10 acres to supply and apply the herbicide.

We guarantee what we do and if any of our treatments do not work we will happily return and re-spray free of charge

Paddock Fencing

We offer a complete fencing service. We can supply and erect any sort of fencing including sawn post and rail, cleft chestnut, rabbit and deer fencing, post and wire fencing and security fencing as well as any type of gate. Quality fencing prevents injuries and animals escaping. It is a sound and practical investment. We are pleased to visit, advise, measure and provide a free no obligation quotation. Just ask.

Fertilising

Intensive grazing is tough on your paddocks. In addition to rotating paddocks try to combine this with an annual feed. This will give the grass a real boost. We recommend a general purpose fertiliser. We have moved over to using a liquid fertiliser applied through the sprayer. We have found this to be a more accurate method of application than using granules and avoids having to handle heavy bags of fertiliser. Timing is not crucial, although it is best to avoid dry periods. The grass will benefit throughout the growing season although early spring is good. Make sure the paddock is rested for at least a couple of weeks, preferably longer, to let the grass get the full benefit. Cost is £55 per acre including VAT



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Harrowing

Harrowing should be carried out at least once a year, it is a job that you cannot really overdo. Using heavy chain harrows helps break-up surface compaction to allow air, moisture and nutrients get down to the roots of the grass and stimulate growth as well as raking out old, dead thatch and moss. If your harrows are a bit light add extra weight like a railway sleeper to ensure you get a good result. It also helps break up any poo if you have not been as diligent at poo picking as you might have been, helping to avoid any bare patches appearing. Harrowing can be done at any time of year so long as the ground has a little 'give' in it but is generally best done in spring. If you want us to spray your paddocks you will need to leave it at least a week after harrowing

Re-seeding

This winter will have resulted in a lot of poached ground and bare areas which will need seeding. Nature hates bare earth and if you don't sow some grass seed then inevitably other less desirable species will move in. Preparation & timing is important. The area to be sown should be harrowed to break up the soil surface. Compacted areas near gates etc. may need rotovating first. We always use fresh seed, it goes off very quickly and that old bag from last year you have in the barn is probably well past it's sell by date. Seed is relatively cheap and it is a false economy to use old stock. It needs moisture to germinate so from now until the end of April is the best time. The new grass will need time to establish so keep the horses off it for as long as possible.

Moss

We often get enquiries at this time of year about moss in paddocks and how to get rid of it. The usual cause of moss growth through the autumn and winter is poor drainage and weak grass leaving bare areas that moss can colonise. Remember nature hates a vacuum!

There are specialist sprays out there which can help control moss but they are tricky to apply through sprayers and others that are sold for getting rid of moss in lawns are horrendously expensive if scaled up to paddock areas.

The simplest way is to go back to the fundamentals of paddock management which is harrowing, fertilising and paddock rotation to encourage good, strong grass growth. The harrowing, if done at the right time, will help rip up the shallow rooted moss. It will also break up surface compaction which helps drainage and soil aeration. Fertilising will give the grass a boost and encourage it to fill in bare areas and outcompete further moss growth. Paddock rotation allows the grass to develop a strong root system.

Over Grazing

Another common cause of poor and weak grass is overgrazing. Short grass means short root systems. This will inhibit the uptake of moisture and nutrients by the roots and limit the amount of sunlight the grass leaves can absorb. All of this gradually weakens the grass and you will notice the difference especially in dry years when the roots are not deep enough to reach water.

As a rule of thumb try not to let grass be grazed below two inches. Rotate your paddocks. Give each a rest of 8-12 weeks if you can during the growing season. Apply fertiliser every year. We appreciate that grazing acreage is often limited but it is better to look after what you have than to have to start again with acres of bare land! We recently had an enquiry from a client about reseeding their paddocks. They had five acres and 40 horses! When I informed them they would need to keep the horse off the new grass for 6 months they suggested they could manage two weeks!

Paddock Rotation

Many of the problems we see are caused by simple over-grazing. Grass needs its leaf area to extract enough energy from the sun to help root-growth. Grass that is permanently grazed flat will not be able to re-charge it's batteries and will gradually get weaker and patchy. Weeds such as buttercup will take advantage shading out the grass further and the downward cycle continues. During the active growing season try to give each paddock a two or preferably four week holiday in which to build up its reserves and apply a light annual fertiliser. Don't overgraze!



Paddock Spraying & Maintenance

We are specialist paddock spraying contractors with over 20 years experience. Spraying pesticide has become increasingly regulated in recent years. By using a specialist spraying contractor you know you are getting the job done accurately and legally. We spray over 400 acres of paddocks each season and get a lot of repeat business and work by recommendation.

Millward Forestry owner, Ian Millward, carries out all the spraying work personally. Ian is also a Lantra accredited pesticide instructor and National Proficiency Test Council pesticide assessor so you are assured of a very professional, friendly and reliable service. Don't worry if you have only a small area. We will spray any area from less than an acre upwards.



Tree & Hedge Planting, Woodland Management, Deer & Rabbit Control

We offer tree and hedge planting services as well as woodland management. We can advise on all your woods and trees and apply for any applicable grants.

If you are sharing your valuable grazing with other animals we can also offer deer and rabbit management services and are pleased to advise on all options of exclusion, removal or control.



Pesticide Training

To apply pesticides yourself you must hold the relevant NPTC certificate of competence.

Ian is a Lantra approved pesticides instructor and we offer training courses to those wishing to obtain the certificate to apply pesticides themselves

Your Details

We know addresses, businesses etc. change. We have no wish to pester you!

If your details are wrong or you no longer wish to receive occasional newsletters from us just let us know.

Booking with Millward Forestry means that you get a highly professional job done that complies with all pesticide legislation. We carry £5 million public liability insurance.

We aim to offer a friendly, helpful, flexible and professional service and can gladly provide references on request

If you want your paddocks sprayed this season please just ring or email and we will book you in

Contact Us

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