Here's How To Make a Rope Wick Applicator

Rope wick applicators are ideal for weeds that are higher than the crop,” says Mike Culp, county Extension agent in Dorchester County, S. C. “They are also excellent for farmers on a tight budget because they’re inexpensive to use and easy to maintain.”

There’s also another plus. Culp says you can make your own with less than 100 dollars’ worth of ordinary plumbing materials.

Culp recently teamed up with two Dorchester County farmers—brothers Doug and J. C. Reeves—to make a rope wick applicator. The finished product was so good that other farmers have been asking the Reeves to supply them.

“It really works,” says Doug Reeves. “All you’ve got to do is hit the weeds and they’re dead. It’s effective and it’s cheap.”

Reeves says using 1 gallon of Roundup with 2 gallons of water gives effective control in most situations and costs about 50 cents per acre.

“The amount of chemical depends on how heavy the weeds are,” he explains. “We generally go through the field at about 4 miles per hour, but in heavy weeds we slow down to 2 miles per hour.”

The Reeves/Culp step-by-step method for making a rope wick applicator goes like this:

1. Cut 3-inch PVC pipe to desired length (13 feet for a four-row applicator, 19 feet for a six-row, etc.).
2. Mark chalk lines for drill holes. Lines should be 1 ½ inches apart.
3. Drill holes for brass compression fittings. (The Reeves recommend using 49/64th-inch holes and a drill press, but you may have to alter this to fit your circumstances and components.) Recommended hole spacing for a 13-foot applicator is shown in the diagram.

   The important thing is that the wicks overlap, leaving no gaps for weeds to escape.
4. Screw ½ x ½-inch brass compression fittings into holes. Screw finger-tight and make sure alignment is straight; then use a wrench or air gun to tighten.
5. Cement a 3-inch PVC plug to one end of pipe and 3-inch PVC elbow with removable plug to the other end.
6. Cut ⅛-inch braided nylon rope into 20-inch lengths. (You will need nineteen, 20-inch lengths for a 13-foot applicator.) Sear the ends of the ropes to prevent unraveling (a butane torch is good for this).
7. Place on rope lengths two ⅛-inch brass compression nuts and two ½-inch rubber O-ring washers. Move the O-ring washers 3 inches from the ends of the rope and pack the washers into the nuts.
8. Thread rope lengths into the applicator compression fittings until they are finger-tight. Repeat.
9. Tighten all fittings with a wrench. Be careful not to overtighten.
10. Mount on tractor, add chemicals, and go get those high weeds.

Photos: Duncan Hite

1. Doug Reeves drills 49/64th-inch holes with a drill press.

2. Holes should be spaced so that wicks overlap.

6. Place nuts and O-ring washers at least 3 inches from end of wicks.

10. County Extension Agent Mike Culp shows completed model.
3 Be careful when aligning brass compression fittings.

4 Fittings can be tightened with a wrench or...

5 ... an air gun.

7 Thread wicks into fittings and...

8 ... connect nuts to fittings.

9 The rope wick applicator is beginning to take shape.

11 Chemicals are added at the removable plug on the elbowed end.

12 This is one way the applicator can be mounted on a tractor.

13 A few clamps do the job.