

March 5, 2007

Control Crabgrass Now

While we're still waiting on winter, spring is almost here. It is now time to apply a pre-emergent for control of crabgrass.

Much of this battle with crabgrass and many other weeds in the lawn can be won simply through timing a pesticide application. You must understand the life cycle of the weed species before you can be successful in with a control program. The life cycle refers to the differences between warm and cool season plants as well as annuals, biennials, and perennials.

Crabgrass is a summer annual. This simply means that it germinates from seed, grows, produces a seedhead, and then it dies when frosted on in October. It must then germinate again the following spring. Another weed common in home lawns is bermudagrass. This weed is actually a summer perennial that emerges in the spring from an established root system, grows throughout the summer and then goes dormant after frost in the fall. Its root system expands each summer and persists in the soil throughout the winter. With this in mind, we can control crabgrass with a pre-emergent but would have to apply a post-emergent to control bermudagrass after green-up.

Let's get back to gaining control of the crabgrass in your lawn. There are many crabgrass preventative materials on the market that will achieve control. Selection of a particular pesticide brand is usually not important, but application timing is critical. You will need to watch your forsythia shrub, or your neighbor's if you don't have one. This is the shrub that blooms yellow in March. The best timing mechanism for crabgrass control is to apply a crabgrass pre-emergent when you see the first yellow bloom. If you delay, you may allow crabgrass to germinate in your lawn. A herbicide called dithiopyr, sometimes marketed as Dimension, will provide pre-emergence control of crabgrass as well as control of germinated crabgrass when applied prior to tillering or the four leaf stage when the crabgrass begins to be noticeable. This herbicide would be a good option if you think you may have waited too late.

Applying the crabgrass pre-emergent at this time will prevent the establishment of crabgrass for approximately eight weeks. A follow-up application about eight weeks later will be essential to prevent the crabgrass for the full 120 day germination period into mid-July. This application will also control the goosegrass in your lawn.

If you notice some crabgrass later in the spring, a herbicide called quinclorac, is available to apply over the top of established crabgrass. This material is a liquid and will be more difficult to apply than the granular crabgrass pre-emergent materials.