

Ag Column
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Your Lawn Can Be Crabgrass Free

Homeowners often call our office in April about crabgrass control in their lawn. Unfortunately, April is too late to control crabgrass the easy way.

Crabgrass can be easily controlled before it establishes in the lawn. This can be accomplished by applying a pre-emergent herbicide in the late winter when the soil warms up.

You must understand the life cycle of the weed species before you can be successful 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 grows each year and persists in the soil throughout the winter. A biennial, although less common in the home lawn, has a two year life cycle where the plant will grow leaves in the first year, turn dormant in the winter, re-emerge the second year and flower.

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. Waiting until the shrub is in full bloom will be 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.

A herbicide, 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 herbicides.

Remember to watch for the forsythia bloom in early March.