

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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WEED CONTROL HELP FOR YOUR LAWN

With warm temperatures occurring sooner than normal, lawns have been greening up fast. Unfortunately this also means weeds are growing or soon will be growing just as quickly. The most common weed of concern is crabgrass and it's prevention. Many are wondering when crabgrass will germinate with the temperatures getting warm so quickly.

As with many plants, soil temperature gives us the best clue as to when crabgrass will begin to grow. Research says that crabgrass begins to germinate when soil temperatures reach 57 to 64°F at around a 1 inch depth, although large quantities of crabgrass seedlings will not start germinating until soil temperatures are closer to 73°F. Currently the soil temperatures are hovering around 60-62°F in much of the state, so we could see some germination now, but even more beginning soon.

The flowering of landscape plants can also be used as a way to estimate when crabgrass might begin germinating. Many people use forsythia blooms as an early indicator that crabgrass will soon start germinating. Forsythia will be in full bloom well prior to crabgrass germination and forsythia flowers will wither near crabgrass germination. Most think that crabgrass germinates when forsythia blooms, but this is false. Homeowners should instead use forsythia blooms as an encouragement to get their pre-emergence application made before crabgrass begins to germinate.

If you haven't applied a pre-emergent, you will need to very soon. There are many crabgrass prevention products, but Dimension (dithiopyr) and Barricade (proflumicafene) are pre-emergent chemicals that consistently provide the best control of crabgrass. Both products can remain active in the soil for many weeks which is why they are used so often. Dimension is also unique in that it can actually kill crabgrass that has already germinated if it is applied before the crabgrass reaches it's first tiller stage.

Broadleaf weeds

There are also many pesky broadleaf weeds that can invade a lawn, so here a few more tips for controlling these weeds.

Controlling broadleaf weeds while they're small is particularly important with such leafy pests as henbit and chickweed, which many gardeners pull by hand. These winter-annual broadleaf weeds return from seed – again and again and again. You may be tempted to spray henbit while it is in bloom. But it's too late. In most cases, you will kill the green parts, but barely affect the underground ones. The weed may fully recover and become a problem for next year.

The only way to stop their repeat performance is to get rid of them before they go to seed, a stage they can reach fairly quickly. If they're in your lawn, you can simply mow often (never cut off more than one-third of the turf height at a time). That will remove a lot of their flowers and prevent the development of seeds those flowers would produce.

Next fall, perennial weeds like dandelions, sprawling chickweed, blue-flowering speedwell, volunteer violets and clover will be storing food for winter; so broadleaf herbicides will have much better odds of providing complete weed control. Plus, if you have an big problem with weeds you'll be able to apply pre-emergence products to prevent the winter-annual broadleaf weeds from ever sprouting.