

Dandelion Control in Lawns

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Dandelion in bloom (left), and in seed production stage (right).

Dandelion is a very common and familiar weed found in Michigan lawns. It is a cool season perennial, flowering from early spring to fall, although the yellow dandelion flowers are most abundant in April and May. The plants have a thick, fleshy taproot, often branched, which can penetrate several feet

into the soil. New shoots can sprout from this taproot.

Hundreds of seeds, each with a white, hairlike tuft of fibers borne on a minute stalk, are also produced by the dandelion plant. Dandelion reproduces and spreads by these seeds which are easily windborne. Seedlings appear in the spring and

summer, but are most numerous in the fall.

Cultural Control

Instead of using herbicides, many people prefer to dig or cut the plants for control. For digging to be suc-

cessful, it must be performed in the spring (April or May). Dandelion roots have the lowest amount of stored food in the spring and are less able to resprout following cutting. Fall digging will not give good control, as root food storage is at its peak. The dandelion roots should be cut as deeply as possible, preferably 4 to 5 inches. Shallow cutting does not provide reliable dandelion kill because sufficient root material remains for resprouting. Dandelion plants not killed by deep, early cutting can produce numerous new shoots and may result in an increased weed problem.

Once dandelions are under control, maintain a thick, well fertilized, and managed lawn. A healthy lawn will best resist the invasion of dandelion and many other weeds.

Chemical Control

Dandelions and many other broadleaf weeds (not grasses) are readily controlled by applications of 2,4-D. The herbicide should be applied to the foliage of the weeds during periods of active weed growth. That is, when there is ample soil moisture and moderate temperatures. Do not spray when rain is predicted within 12 hours.

Fall applications are best for

dandelion control because lawn grasses can fill spaces left from removal of the dandelions. Spring applications will control dandelions, but annual weeds, such as crabgrass, can fill the bare areas. If treating in the spring, spray before dandelion flowers appear. Fall applications also present less hazard of 2,4-D injury to desirable plants than spring treatments. Desirable trees and shrubs are growing less in the fall than in the spring and are less sensitive to 2,4-D. Also, many sensitive home vegetable plants are not present in the fall. However, care must be taken not to apply 2,4-D to desirable vegetation to avoid any possible injury to these plants.

Use only "2,4-D amine" formulations, not "2,4-D ester" products for spraying. The formulation is indicated on the label. Ester products are more volatile and the 2,4-D ester vapors can injure nearby vegetation. Spraying should only be done on days without wind. Avoid spray contact with desirable vegetation.

Sprayers used for 2,4-D applications should not be used for other purposes. Complete removal of 2,4-D from a sprayer is difficult, and minute amounts of 2,4-D can injure many plants. If you must use the sprayer for other purposes, best sprayer cleaning is obtained by rins-

ing twice with ammonia, including spraying through the nozzle. Follow with three rinses of water.

Check the herbicide label for the amount of product to use and be sure to follow the directions. Spray a mixture of herbicide and water onto the weed leaves until the solution begins to run-off. Do not apply excessive amounts of herbicide, as high rates will burn off only the top growth and will not kill the whole plant. Correct rates will move throughout the plant killing roots as well as shoots. For products containing 4 lb/gal 2,4-D (active ingredient) apply 1 qt per acre or 4½ teaspoons per 1000 square feet.

Fertilizer and other granular materials are also available mixed with 2,4-D. Follow the product directions for proper rates. Good control is obtainable when these products are properly used.

Other broadleaf weeds will be killed by 2,4-D treatment. Check the herbicide label for the exact species.

Herbicides are very effective tools for dandelion control. However, they must be used with respect. All agricultural chemicals should only be used in accordance with the instructions and limitations found on the label.

See Extension Bulletin E-653 for further information.

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