

“Annual Summer Grassy Weed Control in Athletic Turf” by Jim Hermann

Annual summer grassy weeds are weeds such as crabgrass, which start and end their life in the same year but produce seeds for future generations. One plant can produce thousands of seeds and these seeds can remain viable in the soil for many years.

Crabgrass and other annual summer grassy weeds are not normally competitive with a dense healthy stand of desirable turf. Therefore, the best line of defense in summer grassy weed control should be to provide an environment favorable to desirable turf.

First, and foremost follow the recommendations presented in your soil test results. Grassy weeds such as crabgrass flourish, and therefore are more competitive, under dry compacted conditions of infertility and low pH.

Second, periodically aerate your fields to relieve compaction and promote desirable turf.

By maintaining the proper soil pH, supplying the turf with the nutrients it needs and aerifying to relieve compaction you are evening out the playing field. (Get it, playing field?) That is, you are giving the desirable turf the environment it needs to be more competitive.

Pre-emergent products (products which interfere with seed sprouting) are typically the most widely used products for the purpose of summer grassy weed control. These products are applied prior to seed germination. They generally require rainfall or irrigation to become established in the root zone

Post-emergent products (products which control existing plants) are another option. Spot treatment with a post emergent product utilizing a backpack sprayer or other application equipment, is sometimes a very practical and environmentally friendly option to a blanket application (application on an entire area) of a pre-emergent product.

There are also products available that have both pre and post emergent control characteristics. By controlling early germinating weeds which have already emerged from the soil and providing control of late germinating seeds that have not yet sprouted, products in this category broaden the window of opportunity for application and control.

Keep in mind; most products with preemergent control characteristics also effect desirable turf seed development. These products should never be used in conjunction with overseeding desirable turf, nor should they be used if seeding is anticipated in the near future. It is sometimes recommended that seeding be delayed as much as 16 weeks after making preemergent applications. Always refer to product label instructions prior to application when contemplating overseeding.

The chemical Siduron is a preemergent grassy weed control that can be applied in conjunction with seeding of cool season turf.

If you have an area or field in particular, which in the past has proven to produce heavy populations of *Cont.*

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annual grassy weeds, preemergent control may be indicated. It is recommended that applications using this type of product be made at least two weeks prior to the onset of conditions that are favorable to weed seed germination. These favorable conditions are typically thought to be when soil temperature reaches 55-60 degrees for an extended period of time in the spring.

It is sometimes recommended that preemergent applications be made based on certain environmental indicators. One such indicator is "when the forsythia blooms in the spring". Another may be when the new foliage emerges ¾ inch on the oak tree. These are only indicators and not hard, fast, do or die rules.

Turf cover and density can have a very great effect on the timing of conditions favorable to seed germination. Crabgrass will germinate in dry, bare areas weeks in advance of areas with existing turf cover. It is typically recommended that preemergent products be applied by the 15th of April.

As the daily temperatures rise and the soil becomes drier, later in the spring season, applications carry more risk of volatilization (loss due to evaporation into the air) than do applications made earlier in the season when conditions are more cool and moist

Many turf managers apply preemergent grassy weed control as soon as the ground thaws. Preemergent products only remain effective in the soil for a certain period of time. This period of time can vary based on weather conditions. Excessively wet or excessively dry weather can affect the effectiveness of a product. Applications made early in the season will sometimes require a repeat application later in the season at a reduced rate to remain effective. This application technique is sometimes referred to as a split application.

Because many of these products are impregnated on various fertilizer formulations, it is sometimes appropriate to incorporate grassy weed control with an early spring fertilizer application. This should only be done when there is a predetermined need for both early spring fertilizer and preemergent weed control and not as a matter of course

When considering a dual-purpose application such as fertilizer and crabgrass control, it is necessary to select a product that is formulated to supply not only the proper amount of pesticide but also the proper amount of fertilizer. Remember, fertility should be your #1 priority. In most situations on athletic fields, heavy populations of grassy weeds are confined to areas of increased traffic and decreased existing turf density. In these situations crabgrass may be better than no grass.

In some situations, tank mixing a post emergent grassy weed control product with a broadleaf weed control product can be an effective option. When incorporated into a renovation program, post-emergent weed control applications made in early July help to prepare an area for fall overseeding by eliminating competition. It should be mentioned at this time that summer applications of broadleaf weed control products might not carry as high a

percentage of control, as do applications made in the late spring or fall when broadleaf weeds are growing more actively.

By taking a leisurely walk out across your field and spot treating existing weeds, you will be taking a positive step (actually quite a few steps) toward a program, which incorporates the principles of IPM (Integrated Pest Management). By treating your field in this manner, you will be surprised to see how much more aware you become of the individual problem areas in your field.

Summer grassy weed control should not be viewed as just another step in a four or five step program that is applied just in case, whether it is needed or not, in order to guarantee the overall success of the program. Summer grassy weed control is nothing more than another tool available to the athletic field manager. Its use should be scrutinized and evaluated in the same way the use of any other tool is evaluated. Effective use of all the tools available to you will ultimately determine the success or failure of your program.

The use of this tool and others will be discussed in more detail at our Spring Field Day on April 3rd in Plainsboro.

(Continued on next page 'Annual')



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Before making an application always read the label instructions to be sure the product is labeled for:

- The site you are treating (athletic field, park, school, etc.)
- The pest you are attempting to control (crabgrass etc.)
- The varieties or types of grass that make up the desirable turf (rye, blue, fescue, cool season, warm season, etc.)

Whenever mixing pesticides always follow label instructions and wear protective clothing and eyewear. Always mix a small sample (jar test) to determine the compatibility of the products prior to mixing a whole batch. Who was it said "there's always room for jello"? I hate when that happens.

Products labeled for the control of summer grassy weeds are pesticides and therefore should only be applied by a licensed pesticide applicator. If you are interested in becoming licensed contact your local Rutgers Cooperative Extension County Office or contact the Pesticide Control Program At (609) 530-5199.

More information may be acquired by reading the publication entitled Crabgrass and Goosegrass Control in Cool Season Turfgrass, written by Dr. Stephen Hart, specialist in weed science at Rutgers. This publication may be accessed at:

www.rce.rutgers.edu/pubs/pdfs/e233.pdf

Or you can request publication #E233 at your local Rutgers Cooperative Extension County Office.

Murphy's Law

Dr. James Murphy is an Associate Extension Specialist in Turfgrass Management for Rutgers, Department of Plant Science. Ask Dr. Murphy your questions: E-mail us at:
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Question: Soccer and lacrosse teams want to utilize the playing fields early in the spring before the grass is actively growing. Is there any way to jump start the turf in the spring?

Answer: There are a couple management techniques that can be used to stimulate early season growth of turf in spring. Late season fertility is one practice that can pay big dividends on fields that receive use in early spring. A good starting point for late season fertility would be two applications of fertilizer, once in September (around Labor Day) and another in October, that applies a total of 2 to 4 pounds of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. If necessary, a third fertilizer application around Thanksgiving can provide even greater stimulation of early season growth.

A turf cover or blanket is another technique that can be used effectively to stimulate early season growth. It is

important to understand how to use turf blankets since the practice can be misused and result in disastrous effects. Regardless of when you put the cover on the turf, a manager needs to monitor turf growth under the cover regularly, particularly during mild weather. Mild winter weather will stimulate considerable shoot growth under a cover; if this occurs, the covers will need to be removed to avoid over stimulating growth and possibly allow mowing. Greater disease incidence can also occur under a turf blanket during relatively warm wet weather. Thus, the cover may need to be moved off the turf occasionally to avoid stimulating disease. Once a cover is removed from the turf the stimulation of growth will begin to wane as the soil temperatures cool and return to "normal". Therefore, moving the cover off and on the turf will be necessary to achieve the greatest effects on early season growth stimulation without encouraging excessive growth or disease. Covers also have the disadvantages of extra labor needed to move the cover on and off the turf as well as storage space when the cover is not in use. Covers may be difficult to hold in place during windy conditions especially on open exposed fields. ;)

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