

# Keep Weeds in Check All Season Long

Are you planning a good, comprehensive control program for your turf in 1995? Great idea. But if you're smart, you already started on it this Fall. That's when the best cool-season turf managers lay the groundwork for fewer weed problems come Spring.

Healthy dense turf goes a long way toward keeping weeds out. If your turf went into the Winter in good shape, barring any heavy Winterfill it should be in prime condition to fend off most intrusive species.

"Where I would expect to find weeds is where the turf is in bad shape coming off this Winter," said Tom Voigt, extension turfgrass specialist at the University of Illinois.

But areas of the Midwest soaked by heavy flooding won't necessarily be doomed to heavy weed infestation—if you were able to get on your turf to work on it. "Most of our wet weather occurred during the Summer, so those who worked in the Fall to get their turf in shape have a good chance of coming out of it in decent shape," he said.

His advice: Go out early in the season to ascertain the condition of turf, in areas where you most expect trouble. "The areas where turf is thin are optimal for weed invasion," Voigt said.

Annual grasses like crabgrass and broadleaf weeds like knotweed are among the first culprits to show up in the Spring. They are extremely opportunistic, muscling in where turf is poor and spotty.

Use a good preemergent herbicide just before crabgrass first germinates, but if you're planning to overseed thin spots, be choosy about your preemergent, Voigt said. Siduron (Tupersan) is about the only option for avoiding injury to newly seeded cool-season turfgrass, he said.

If turf is healthy and had little crabgrass or goosegrass problem last year, and you won't be overseeding, another method of controlling annual grasses is to use no preemergent. Wait to see where grassy weeds come in, then hit those spots with a postemergent effective on grasses such as Dimension (dithiopyr) or Acclaim (tenoxyprop), Voigt suggested. "If you're comfortable with the quality of your turf, you may be willing to just wait and use a postemergent," he said.

## Broadleaf Control

Broadleaf control with a postemergent containing a phenoxy or dicamba should be applied when weeds are actively growing. Chemicals are more easily absorbed then and, once weeds are killed, the turfgrass can fill in the gaps quickly.

"People complain that their herbicides didn't work," Voigt said. "But if the right herbicide is used on the right weed, application is usually the problem. The timing is critical—you want to make sure the weeds are actively growing for it to work."

If temperatures are too warm for cool-season turf to grow, discoloration and failure to control weeds may result, he said. Earlier in the season, when temperatures are cooler,

ester formulations should work fine, but as temperatures warm and volatility is a problem, less-volatile amino formulations are a better choice.

And, of course, reading the label and learning the biology of turfgrass and the weeds themselves are essential. "For example, many perennial broadleaves that are cool season, such as dandelions, follow growth cycles similar to turfgrass," Voigt said. "So when your bluegrass lawn is growing actively so are the dandelions, and that's when you want to apply controls."

A good weed control program doesn't disappear come Fall. "You can do a whole lot of good in the Fall," Voigt said. Many perennial cool-season weeds are once again going through an active growth period. And there's less chance that drift or volatilization will harm other plants.

A cold, dry Winter will probably result in late-germinating Winter annuals in the transition zone, said Dr. Dennis Martin, extension turf specialist at Oklahoma State University. "I think people who put Roundup on early over the dormant bermudagrass are going to be surprised," he said.

Martin said a postemergent herbicide applied at the same time as preemergent crabgrass herbicide will help.

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## Weeds —

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Martin recommends standard split applications if turf has a history of problems with goose crabgrass. And be sure irrigation, fertilization, insect and disease control and other maintenance programs are fine-tuned in order to maintain a dense healthy turf and keep weeds out.

Achieving a dense turf stand is also important before using a turf growth regulator. "Especially in the northern part of our region, where you have to regrow 50 to 60 percent of the bermudagrass canopy. It's important that you have turf as dense as you want it before you use a growth regulator," Martin said.

Martin has another reminder for those using growth regulators—they don't work on weeds in the same manner as turf. Good weed control is not replaced by a turf growth regulator, but must be used in combination.

### Know Your Turf

Go outside and take a close look at your turf this Spring—that's the first step in good weed control, says Tom Cook, turfgrass extension specialist at Oregon State University. Note thin areas and reseed them.

Using an inexpensive thermometer, begin monitoring soil and air temperature. Push the thermometer into the soil about one inch deep in areas where soil will warm up first—south-facing slopes and open areas near sidewalks and driveways.

Crabgrass germinates at 55 to 60 degrees F. and a pre-emergent should be applied about two weeks before germination. "When soil temperature is above 50, that's when you should apply pre-emergent," Cook said.

A combination product of several herbicides is still the best strategy for broadleaf weeds, giving broad-spectrum control and allowing lower rates of the dicamba, Cook said. But long-term use can also result in resistance in weeds like oxtails and ground ivy. In that case, switch to another herbicide.

When spraying broadleaves, be careful of other plants. "Spring weed control is a kind of strange experience," Cook said. "When it's optimal to spray for broadleaf weeds, that's when trees and shrubs are most susceptible to drift."

Before leafout, use an ester formulation; afterward, an amine form of the product will minimize potential injury to ornaments.

—Source: *Turf West*, March 1994

## Wetting Agents —

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always more effective than wetting agents alone. Regular use of wetting agents in these situations is important because they are not eliminating the condition, only temporarily modifying it. Regular use of wetting agents enhances water infiltration and drainage, resulting in more efficient water use, fewer overly wet/dry spots and better quality turf.

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