

Question and Answer

Question: This year it seems as though we have a bumper crop of crabgrass. What is the right way to deal with this problem?

Fact: Crabgrass is a summer annual that germinates, matures, reseeds itself and dies within the confines of one calendar year. The seeds germinate and small plants emerge in the late spring or early summer after soil temperatures reach or exceed 55 degrees for an extended period of time. The young crabgrass is coarse textured and light green in color. Initially, as an immature plant, crabgrass really doesn't seem too competitive or invasive. As it matures crabgrass has a very prostrate or horizontal growth habit, which interferes with the existence and development of desirable turf. These mature crabgrass plants reseed before dying with the first frost thus setting the scene for next year's generation.

Answer: The correct answer is that there is no single right or correct way to deal with crabgrass. The best answer to this question lies in your ability as a sports field manager to assess your individual turf program and as such the degree to which crabgrass infestation impacts on the objectives of that program.

There are a number of ways to deal with crabgrass control. You can treat in the spring with a preemergent control product or you can treat in the summer or fall with a selective post-emergent product. You can even treat with a product combining both pre and post-emergent qualities thereby extending the application window of that product in the late spring, early summer. In certain situations a non-selective post-emergent (total kill) application is warranted.

Now, what does all this mean? A 'post' emergent crabgrass control product is a product that controls the crabgrass after it has emerged and is visible within the stand of desirable turf. A 'pre' emergent crabgrass control product is a product that prevents an anticipated infestation of crabgrass by interfering with the seed germination. 'Selective' means that you have discretion on what plants you want controlled based on the label of the product chosen. 'Nonselective' means you have little discretion on what plants are affected by the application. A complete understanding of the label description of any product is required by every applicator prior to the application of that product. It should be understood that most preemergent crabgrass control products also interfere with the germination and establishment of desirable turf seed.

As a sports field manager, my main objective is to maintain my fields in a 'safe' and 'playable' condition. If I can't shut a field down and crabgrass is the only existing turf cover, it would be my decision to leave it. Once this decision is made, a long-term plan would need to be considered in order to correct the problem in the future. This could include a late fall seeding after the cool weather has killed or severely compromised the development and competition of existing crabgrass. Slice seeding is recommended for this procedure. A follow-up application the following season in the late spring of a crabgrass control product would be indicated. This application should be made after the new seeding has emerged and established in the spring.

If in late summer, it is decided that there is a significant amount of desirable turf within an infestation of crabgrass, the crabgrass could be treated selectively with a post emergent

product. In this situation overseeding of desirable turf could be accomplished earlier in the fall while still being effective due to the earlier elimination of competition caused by the crabgrass. The crabgrass control product label should be referenced to insure that seeding is not accomplished too soon after the crabgrass control application.

If the field can be shut down for the fall season, the following options exist.

1. If desirable turf is non-existent or at best not worth considering, a non-selective herbicide could be applied to kill all existing vegetation and overseeding accomplished after the label recommended wait time.

2. If there is a significant amount of desirable turf, a selective post emergent product could be applied to eliminate the crabgrass and seeding could be accomplished after the label recommended wait time has elapsed.

The decision would then need to be made on how to deal with the crabgrass problem the following season.

Crabgrass thrives in compacted soil of low fertility and hot dry weather. Providing an environment conducive to an aggressive, healthy turf is the most environmentally conscientious approach to any and all pest control. This environment would include but not be limited to proper soil pH, adequate soil aeration, adequate soil moisture and adequate nutrient availability. An important outside influence contributing to the control of crabgrass is proper mowing management. ♦

Field Tip- A Point to Remember

by Jim Hermann, CSFM

Problem:

When delineating a baseball or softball field or squaring the base paths of an infield, all dimensions initiate from the apex or back point of home plate. The problem for me has always been that once home plate has been installed I cannot drive a spike at that precise location from which to connect the tape measure or string.

Solution:

Take a piece of wood approximately 2' in length by eight 8" or 10" in width and drill a 3/8" inch hole in each corner.

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