

# PROBLEM SOLVERS

by Balakrishna Rao, Ph.D.

## Drift control

**Problem:** Are you aware of any material that may aid in minimizing the spray drift of pesticides? (New York)

**Solution:** There are several products available including MIST-Control (drift retardant and deposition aid for pesticide sprays) by Miller Chemical and Fertilizer Corp. Although reports indicate the product is useful in drift control on small vegetable crops, we have not seen any data regarding its use on shade trees nor have we conducted any research.

Therefore, try it on an experimental basis. Read the label and follow the directions.

## Oxalis: a stubborn weed

**Problem:** Every year summer oxalis infestations present a serious problem in many lawns. We have used Killex in the past years with poor results. Are there some effective chemicals to manage this problem? I would appreciate your comments. (Ontario, Canada)

**Solution:** Oxalis is considered to be one of the most difficult to control weeds. The Canadian Ministry of Agriculture and Food recommends repeated use of mixtures containing amine formulations of 2,4-D with mecoprop, dichloroprop and/or dicamba.

The Killex you mentioned is a mixture of this type. Unfortunately, reports indicate that Killex doesn't provide adequate control, and the ester formulations available in the United States are not registered for use in Canada. The only choice you have is to mechanically remove the plants or use repeated applications of Killex, as needed.

Remember that these herbicides adversely affect the root systems of turfgrass roots also. Therefore, it is a good idea to spot treat an area for specific oxalis problems rather than to treat the entire lawn.

## Preventing rabbit feeding injury

**Problem:** What can we use to protect plants from rabbit feeding injury? Every year we see a number of plants damaged by these animals. (Pennsylvania)

**Solution:** Although it is not impossible, it is difficult to manage this problem. Different university extension services recommend the use of Thiram (paints and/or sprays), ammonium soaps, capsaicin bone tar oil (follow label directions), or Rosin—alcohol repellent (dormant: 7 pounds tree rosin in 1 gallon denatured alcohol—paint in; 7 pounds rosin in 2 gallons denatured alcohol—spray).

Reports indicate that products containing Thiram work satisfactorily. If some of these materials work well for you, let us hear about your success.

## Surface fertilizer application

**Problem:** Are there any serious problems we should be concerned about in surface applying granular fertilizers for fertilizing trees? We are thinking of providing tree fertilization service by surface applying the fertilizer. (Illinois)

**Solution:** Remember that, when applying fertilizer to trees growing in lawn areas, the amount of fertilizer recommended for trees may injure the grass under the tree or cause excessive growth. The burn potential would be greater if the fertilizer contains too much of a quick-release source of nitrogen and if the tree fertilizer is in addition to fertilizer applied to the lawn.

Although surface application of fertilizer is fast and relatively inexpensive, the potential for problems in quality lawns will probably cancel out the time and labor advantage. For best results, the tree fertilizer should be introduced into the root zone and dispersed uniformly.

## Football field treatments

**Problem:** When is the best time to do dethatching and topdressing of a football field? We are interested in this service and would be dealing with warm-season turfgrasses, like bermudagrass, in the South and cool-season turfgrasses in the North. (North Carolina)

**Solution:** Generally, more than 1/2-inch of thatch is considered to be potentially detrimental to the turfgrass culture and quality. However, experts dealing with athletic field management consider about an inch of thatch desirable on a football field.

If the thatch layer exceeds the desirable thickness, dethatch cool-season grasses in early fall while they are still growing. If this operation interferes with ballgames, then consider doing it in spring. Warm-season grasses, like bermudagrass, can be dethatched in the spring just before greenup.

After dethatching, topdress the area with the same soil type or 100 percent sand. Do not use organic matter on a sand-based ball field. Organic materials will seal the field in time and cause poor water movement, resulting in surface water accumulation. If standing water is a problem, consider improving the drainage by installing vertical or French drainage systems.



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Questions should be mailed to Problem Solver, Weeds Trees & Turf, 7500 Old Oak Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44130. Please allow 2-3 months for an answer to appear in the magazine.