

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

Pre-emergents applied early in spring give good control, too

Proper fertilization and mowing allow turfgrass to out-compete crabgrass, but sometimes pre-emergents needed.

■ Most LCOs would be tickled if they could apply a pre-emergent about two weeks prior to crabgrass germination. That way the material would be in place to kill emerging seedlings and still, probably, be active through the 8- to 10-week period of additional crabgrass germination.

LCOs usually can't be so precise with



No wonder homeowners hate crabgrass in their lawns. (photo courtesy Monsanto)

applications. Routing pressures won't allow it. They have to treat some lawns much earlier in the spring.

Not to worry, says Dr. Clark Throssel, associate professor of agronomy at Purdue University. Pre-emergents applied earlier in the spring, when soil temperatures are low, should still be effective when the crabgrass germinates.

The reason: soil microbes don't start breaking down pre-emergents until the soil temperature rises. Crabgrass, a prolific seed producer, starts germinating when soil temperatures climb to around 55-60° F. for three to five days in a row.

"Once that seed starts to germinate, its development occurs rapidly and your opportunities, particularly using pre-emergence herbicides, to control crabgrass vanish very quickly," explains Throssel.

Crabgrass is one of the home lawn's biggest curses and the LCO's biggest enemies.

It germinates later in the spring than most other plants. (In the far south it can germinate year-round.) Although the first frost signals its end, in the dog days of summer, when the sun is high and hot, crab-



Clark Throssel: properly mowed, fertilized, watered turfgrass will crowd out crabgrass.

grass is one of the toughest, most defiant weeds in the lawn. From a homeowner's viewpoint it's an ugly sight—squat, spreading, broad-leaved, and light green.

The best longterm strategy for keeping it at bay is proper fertilizing, watering and mowing. Crabgrass won't germinate in the shade of healthy turf.

"Keep the mowing height up," advises Throssel. "It creates a dense turf which shades the soil surface and reduces the amount of (crabgrass) seed that germinates. It makes the turfgrass more competitive with the crabgrass plants."

Even so, just about any appearance of crabgrass in lawns is unacceptable to most homeowners. That's one of the big reasons they hire lawn care professionals.

Throssel spoke about crabgrass at the PLCAA Convention this past November.

—Ron Hall

Tips for better product applications

■ So you've been a lawn applicator a few years and you think you're a hotshot.

Even so, you probably need a refresh-er. Now, as the season starts, is a good time for it.

That's not to say that what you're doing is wrong. No two applicators have exactly the same spray/spread techniques. Likely, all you'll have to make is slight changes in your application technique, or adjustments in your delivery equipment.

"We tend to become very complacent in our application techniques. We don't



Pre-season practice session, spraying water over your parking lot, good way to sharpen application skills. (photo courtesy TruGreen/ChemLawn)

really focus on this," says TruGreen/ChemLawn regional technical manager Bob Avenius.

In fact, Avenius advises that when a particular product isn't giving the results it should, examine first how the product is being put down.

Common spray application faults:

- putting down too much product in trim areas and on turns,
- not overlapping during passes over the lawn,
- over-pressurizing backpack sprayers,

continued on page 69

Newer products give additional crabgrass control options

Flexibility. That's what several of the newer herbicides give turfgrass managers in controlling annual grassy weeds, says Fred Haskett of the J.C. Erlich Co. in Reading, Pa.

The products are:

- **fenoxaprop-ethyl**, a post-emergence herbicide, introduced several years ago and marketed under the trade name Acclaim, and,

- **dithiopyr**, with both pre- and post-emergence activity and sold as Dimension.

Haskett, the company's lawn & tree division manager, says these materials "add another tool and lessen our dependence on the methods we used in the past." They don't, however, eliminate the use of pre-emergence products, he stresses. The Pennsylvania company uses Acclaim to deal with two situations, says Haskett:

1) where a pre-emergent failure necessitates a retreat to satisfy a customer, and

2) on a mid-summer sale to a new customer whose property has a significant crabgrass problem.

He says Acclaim effectively controls germinated crabgrass up to



Haskett: encouraging results from tests.

Tips (continued from page 66)

- not holding the nozzle at the correct height off the turf,

- walking too fast or too slow.

Technicians using granular product are sometimes guilty of:

- not checking spreader settings,

- not filling their spreaders with enough material or too much material,

- not using a spreader shield or cover,

- holding the handle of the spreader so high that the box isn't level,

- walking too fast or too slow,

- not walking in a straight line.

Avenius says faulty application techniques are usually easy to correct, but first they have to be identified. Videotape is often an excellent help.

Want a down-and-dirty check on how you're doing? Spray water over your company's asphalt parking lot, just like you're making an application on a lawn. Then calculate how much water you've applied and what the pattern looks like as it dries. That way you get to see where there's been too much applied or too little.

To monitor or check spreader settings, keep a Lesco gauge handy, and use it often.

"Regardless of what products we use, unless we put these products down correctly, we'll never get the results we need," says Avenius, who works out of Indianapolis.

—Ron Hall

TALK TO TERRA

FOR TERRAMARK SPI

When you want to take the guesswork out of spraying.

Terramark SPI spray pattern indicator shows you exactly where you've applied liquid pesticides and fertilizers. Terramark's distinctive dark blue color helps you avoid overlaps and skips. Plus, it also helps you identify and minimize drift problems. With Terramark, there's no guesswork, no costly problems. You save time and money. So when you want to take the guesswork out of spraying, talk to Terra for Terramark SPI. You'll see the difference.

 **Terra**[®]
Terra International, Inc.



the four-tiller stage. When the plant gets larger, a higher rate of the product is needed along with the use of a surfactant.

Also during 1992, J.C. Erlich evaluated Dimension on about 90 properties, primarily those requiring spring seeding, or those coming onto the program in mid-season. Results were encouraging, says Haskett.

With this new product, an LCO should be able to seed in the spring and then come back (in late May or early June in Pennsylvania) with an application of dithiopyr to take care of crabgrass both before and after its germination. Also, broadleaf controls can be applied at the same time.

He says his company's most experienced technicians will continue to evaluate dithiopyr this season in field conditions.

In theory anyway, these newer turf-grass herbicides should allow some LCOs to apply fertilizer only during their first application round—if not to all their lawns, to at least their best lawns. This would reduce costs for this first application while extending the time the LCO has to control crabgrass.

Haskett shared his ideas during a presentation at the PLCAA Conference in Indianapolis this past November.

—Ron Hall



Emerging crabgrass, easiest to control when plant youngest. (photo courtesy Monsanto)

Desert landscaper believes quality work delivers profits—eventually



Gustafson appears tiny beside this sahuaro cactus near his home on the outskirts of Tucson.

Steve Gustafson says competition is good but too many 'also-rans' in Tucson market keeps prices and wages low.

■ Steve Gustafson, owner of Blooming Desert Landscape, Tucson, Ariz., is a big man who wears big, dusty cowboy boots.

With the scraping and crunching these boots are making on the crumbling granite, it's unlikely he'll surprise any critters, which is fine with him. His destination is a 55-foot-plus sahuaro cactus (*Carnegiea gigantea*). It's just a 15-minute walk through tugging, thorny brush from his house.

"If I could just buy this piece of property, can you imagine what I could do with it?" says Steve, daydreaming of the ultimate desert landscape he could design with this grandpappy cactus as its crowning glory.

It weighs at least four

tons. He's counted 72 "arms" growing from it. How long has it been growing there? 200 years? Steve thinks longer, long enough at least to see the city sprout and grow out toward it.

There are millions of sahuaro in Southern Arizona. Nothing is as noticeable in the desert unless it's the craggy mountains that surround Tucson. Even the mountains appear to be covered with quills, which are the sahuaro.

But, there's only one Steve Gustafson.

At 39 he's a bear of a man, with an animated, sun-reddened face. A fascinating conversationalist, his language is peppered with anecdotes of both flora and fauna although he's a relatively recent arrival to the Arizona-Sonora Desert. He was raised and educated in Portland, Ore. He landed in Tucson, doing post-doctoral work at the University of Arizona, Tucson.

He left academia and research because he says he'd rather work in the practical and applied aspects of horticulture.

"I became involved in landscape work when I was about nine with my three brothers. We mowed and took care of about 30 lawns," says Gustafson. "As the older brothers went to college, the younger ones took over. I was the last one."

He continued to work on yards as he earned degrees at Portland State and a Ph.D. in horticulture at Oregon State University. Now his goal is to be recognized as one of Tucson's best landscape contractors.

That, says Gustafson, is a tall order. Profits are getting harder and harder to dig out of the crowded Tucson landscape market, he says. He guesses there are

about 50 legitimate firms and maybe twice that many "also rans" in Tucson. That's one reason why industry prices and wages are low here, he says.

Starting from a meager \$6,000 investment in 1985, his company topped \$400,000 in sales within two years. Then, harsh reality arrived in the form of debts and client bankruptcies. He had to rethink his company's direction, as he set about rebuilding both its customer base and its profitability.

He now targets Blooming Desert at the residential market, specifically custom homes. (Design/build accounts for about 80% of his sales, maintenance the remaining 20%.)

These efforts show hope. As the residential home market in Tucson warmed, several of his landscapes earned citywide recognition as award winners.

These efforts included both informal and semiformal groupings of desert plants. Cactuses stand out in his landscapes. There are more species of cactuses in the Southwest, more than anywhere else on earth. They come in all sizes and shapes—barrels, balls, sticks and paddles. Gustafson combines them in landscapes with other desert species like aloes, agaves and yuccas.

"We use materials that minimize the harshness of local conditions, but also materials that will do well over time," says Gustafson. "Not everything we use is native, but it has to fit in with and help beautify the harsh environment here."

Decorative gravel around the plants helps keep weeds down but Steve says he still has to apply pre-emergents about twice a year. Even desert plants must be fertilized regularly, says Gustafson, with insecticides used as needed.

"Just because we don't have a lot of lawns to mow, there's still a lot of pruning and horticultural activities we've got to get done," he says. "In fact, I think I could argue that you have to be a better horticulturist here."

Gustafson says Blooming Desert Landscape will continue to sell and deliver the highest quality work it can. Then, he hopes, his company can command better prices for its work.

"We've learned to take the good with the bad, but we think that hard work and perseverance will eventually pay off," says Gustafson. "even though we're still working. And waiting."

—Ron Hall



This Blooming Desert Landscape installation project earned Gustafson city beautification award.

TALK TO TERRA

FOR PLEX

**When your pesticides need
more than a penetrator.**

For a pesticide to do its job, it has to get through surface foliage or turf to the real problem areas. Plex has been shown to be twice as effective as other adjuvants in improving pesticide penetration.* But that's only the start. With Plex, you get more. Plex spreads the pesticide evenly over plant surfaces and then forms a protective film to reduce losses from sudden showers and heavy dew. Plus, Plex keeps your pesticide performing, providing extra protection from losses commonly caused by sunlight and evaporation. When you want more performance from your pesticides, talk to Terra Professional Products.

 **Terra**
Terra International, Inc.

**Trial results available
upon request.*



Circle No. 152 on Reader Inquiry Card

Wisconsin LCO is satisfied with results of new weed program

Spring-Green Lawn Care's 'biological' program stresses fertility, cuts herbicide use, receives customer approval.

■ When, just over a year ago, Steve Good redirected his company into a "biological" program, he was admittedly apprehensive.

After all, his Spring-Green Lawn Care franchise had been successful as a traditional application company as it grew toward \$1.4 million in annual sales in and around Racine, Wis., in the far southeast corner of the state. "People aren't always receptive to change, especially when what you did in the past worked," says Good.

But he felt he had to make fundamental changes in product choice and product application to deliver the new earth-friendly service he wanted to market. The catch: these changes had to work. Spring-Green had to continue to give homeowners 1) green lawns and 2) weed-free lawns. Or they'd leave.

One change in the program involved grassy weed control; and, Good realized, nothing irks a homeowner more—especially one paying for professional service—than a healthy crop of crabgrass in their lawn.

But Good knew the credibility of his company's new efforts would suffer if it continued to blanket-apply pre-emergence herbicides each spring to control grassy weeds.

So, along with switching to organic-based fertilizers, Good abandoned blanket pre-emergence applications in favor of targeted, as-needed applications of a relatively new material, dithiopyr, marketed under the trade name Dimension Turf Herbicide. (Its manufacturer, Monsanto, claims the herbicide has both pre-emergence and early post-emergence activity.)

As Spring-Green technicians walk a lawn, applying granular organic-based fertilizer (Spring Valley Turf Products), they also scout for breakthrough grassy weeds, which they then spot-treat using Solo backpack sprayers. They also treat turf borders. Good says his company backs up its service with the guarantee of a retreat.

"The success of the whole program

depends on your technicians," says Good. "If the technicians don't take the backpack sprayers out of their trucks and use them, you're going to have trouble."

Spring-Green didn't change its program without first directing a strong educational effort at its customers.

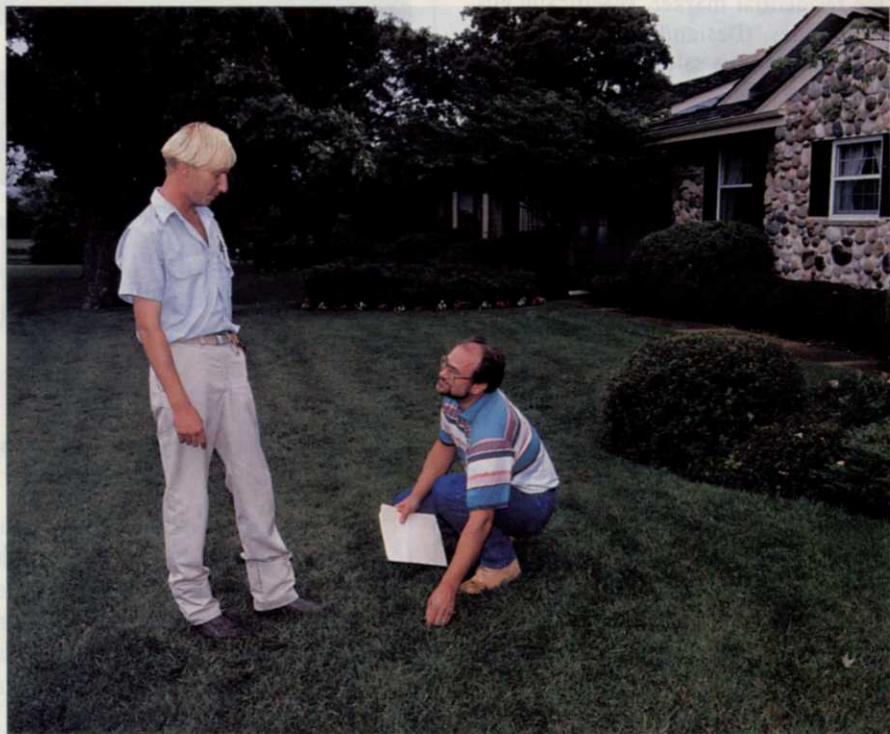
"We're retraining our customers," says Good. "We tell them that a strong, healthy

turf is going to resist crabgrass infestation. We also leave mowing and watering instructions with them. It's working great."

Of the approximate 1500 customers served by his company, only about six still request the traditional program, says Good.

"For a while, the phone rang all the time with people who were pleased. People told their neighbors that we were not broadcasting lawn chemicals, and just taking care of what is needed."

—Tobi Bolt



Steve Good, kneeling, and Dion La Meer of Spring-Green say the best defense against weeds is healthy turfgrass and technicians who know how to scout.

Write for PLCAA ad guidelines

■ Lawn care advertising continues to be scrutinized at the state and federal level.

To help lawn care professionals provide information about their products and services that isn't misleading or incomplete, the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) developed advertising guidelines that apply to all communications with the public and customers.

"The advertising practices of our industry continue to receive a lot of attention from state and federal regulators," says Tom Delaney of PLCAA. "Lawn care professionals need to keep in mind that advertising, by definition, includes all communications with customers and the public,

including letters and any statements made over the phone or in person."

The guidelines include information LCOs need to know about EPA and FTC advertising standards. They describe language that is considered misleading, conflicting or unsubstantiated. They also explain what to say about safety claims.

"All lawn care professionals should have this document on hand when they're developing their advertising materials and company literature," says Delaney.

For a free copy, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: *PLCAA Advertising Guidelines*, 1000 Johnson Ferry Rd., Suite C-135, Marietta, GA 30068-2112.

Deer tick risk smallest on turf

The nymph of tiny *Ixodes dammini* most abundant in woodlots. Nymphs are responsible for 70 percent of Lyme disease cases.

by Deborah Smith-Fiola

■ Chances of having a deer tick attach itself to you are measurably less on maintained and mowed lawns than in the woods or around property edges, fences or brush.

That's significant because the deer tick (*Ixodes dammini*) is the vector (carrier) of debilitating Lyme disease, which is most common in some areas of the Northeast, but has been reported in the Midwest also.

Actually, it's an immature stage of the deer tick, its nymph, that's believed to cause 70 percent of all Lyme disease cases. But, it's not so easy to know when the tick is present. While the adult deer tick is the size of a sesame seed, its nymph is about half that size.

When New Jersey researchers wanted to find out just where people are most likely to

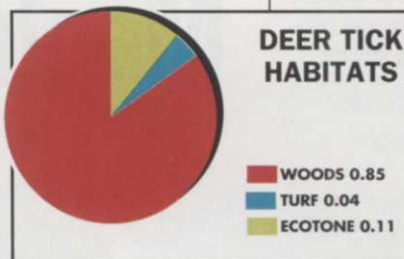
encounter deer tick nymphs they selected 34 residential homesites of 1/2 acre to 1 1/2 acres in Ocean County, New Jersey's Lyme disease hot-spot. They grouped the sites into three specific habitats: the woods, the ecotone (or "edge" of the woods, where the woods meet the lawn), and the turf.

During May and June, they combed the homesites for immature ticks. Late spring is when the nymphs are most active. It's also when people are outdoors a lot.

Of the tick nymphs they found, about 85 percent were in the woods. That's where the immature tick has the greatest chance of finding hosts—mice, birds, rabbits, opossums, raccoons and other small vertebrates.

The ecotone/edge of the woods contained 11 percent of the immature deer ticks.

Turfgrass lawns yielded just 4 percent of the nymphs. They may have ended up in the turf after dropping off an animal host, when fully fed (engorged), where they molt to the nymph stage. Immature deer ticks rarely move more than 10 feet from where they molted, and were mostly found in lawns close to the ecotone (within 4 to 6 feet) if present at all.



Homes with wooded buffers between yards had a large amount of edge habitat, and had a greater number of ticks. Untended borders had more ticks than did landscaped borders. Woodpiles or brushpiles held more ticks nymphs too, probably because there were also more mice there. Mice are a key animal host for immature ticks.

Other studies in New York and Connecticut found 68 percent of deer ticks (all stages) in the woods, 21 percent in the ecotone, and 2 percent in the lawn. Ornamental planting beds yielded 9 percent.

Factors adding to the risk for encountering deer tick nymphs and contracting Lyme disease include: presence of pets (especially dogs), deer paths, birdbaths, woodpiles, brushpiles, bird feeders, and other items or practices which encourage wildlife near the home or encourage people to enter the woods.

Methods of personal protection (repellents, tucking pants into socks) are also necessary in high risk sites. Pesticides labeled for deer tick control can be targeted to high-risk deer tick habitats.

—The author is an entomologist and member of the New Jersey Governor's Council for Lyme Disease.

Tulsa LCO says clients like their lawn care information on video

by Brad Johnson

■ How many lawn care professionals have the time to sit down with every new customer and explain exactly what we can and cannot do with our service? Usually, we simply leave the expectations of our new customers to chance. That's risky.

What about those customers who don't mow and water properly? Do we just hope that our services will offset their mistakes?

Two years ago we wanted to do something about unrealistic expectations and poor cooperation from customers. But, what really moved us to action was an extensive winterkill in our Tulsa marketplace in 1990. Trying to explain to customers, many of them cancelled customers, why the winterkill was not our fault, led us to produce a customer education video, "Side by Side."

We put the 15-minute video to use during

the 1992 season. It explains:

- What our service can and cannot do.
- Proper mowing and watering practices.
- Insect, disease and weed control.
- Fertilization.
- How customers can help us give them better results.

We've tried written customer education manuals. We've used newsletters, and still do. But, some customers don't read them. Given a choice, it seems, most would rather watch a short video than read.

This past season we used about 450 videos in distributing to over 1,000 of our new customers at our company. We simply left a copy of the video, along with a pre-paid mailer (\$1.05 in postage) in their invoice bag with their initial application.

We also left a survey concerning the video to complete and send back to us. Most customers viewed the video and commented positively.

Also, over 70% of the customers sent the video back after viewing. Many videos were used three, four and five times during the season.

This season we're going to use our video as a marketing tool also. We'll be distributing them with leads in 1993 and allowing our prospects and new customers to just keep the video. We believe this will not only generate more leads with the offer of a free video, but will also lead to a higher closing rate.

Does the video really lead to higher customer retention rates, fewer service problems and, in the end, higher profits? After just one year, we really can't say how much our video affected these areas. But, we're convinced they generated better customer relations and cooperation. Many clients said so.

We also believe that companies who make the effort to educate their customers will be ahead of the competition in the 1990s. Our experience with video suggests it's one of the education/communication tools that works, and is affordable.

—The author is owner of green up! Inc. For more information about video, contact Customer Solutions in Tulsa, Okla.; (800) 779-2196.