

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-leafed, 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,

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