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Crabgrass Control And Timing Of Herbicides In Turf

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To best control crabgrass in home lawns, apply a preemergence herbicide prior to any germination. It is better to apply the product weeks before expected germination than take a chance on early germination. Our target date for preemergence application is prior to April 1 in southern/western Kentucky and April 15 in central/northern Kentucky. Normally, however, significant germination will not occur until May and some years early June. Most data indicates that crabgrass begins germination when the soil temperature at the 4 inch depth reaches about 55° F. Since cold soil temperature greatly reduces microbial breakdown of the preemergence herbicide, applications made during the late winter or early spring are almost as effective as an April application.

Even if the target date passes and a few crabgrass plants are evident, it is still important to make the application in order to control germination during the peak germination period. In Kentucky, the peak period for germination is normally in late May or early June. This is one of the reasons that split applications are usually more effective.

Timing preemergence applications during forsythia bloom is often suggested. It is an indicator of temperature, albeit a poor one. With our extremely variable weather, some forsythia has bloomed three times in the past few months.

Dimension (dithiopyr) is a preemergence product that also has early post activity. However it is only effective at its highest use rate, when used in its liquid formulation, and only when the crabgrass is in the one to three leaf stage of growth.

The major homeowner products available are: 1.) benefin + trifluralin (Team), 2.) pendimethalin (Pre-M, Halts), 3.) dithiopyr (Dimension), and 4.) prodimine (Barricade). All are equally good if applied at their proper rate of active ingredient. The granular products are somewhat more effective than liquid applied formulations. However it is sometimes difficult to find granular products without nitrogen fertilizer. Most products are therefore dual purpose – control crabgrass and fertilize the turf. *Because the nitrogen often causes excessive top growth (mowing), increases some disease problems, reduces root growth, increases summer weeds, etc. It is best to utilize those products without the fertilizer.*

The greatest problem with these products however is that the high use rate listed on the bag is usually only about half that required to get all-season crabgrass control. Last year, the weather became very hot in August, the turf thinned, and crabgrass exploded. Even with an early application of a preemergence product used at the correct label rate, crabgrass still dominated most lawns.

To prevent this, especially where crabgrass pressure is heavy, a second application should be made in late May or early June.

Escaped crabgrass can be suppressed in June with a post emergence crabgrass herbicide such as MSMA (or DSMA). To reduce the potential for serious turf burn when using MSMA, be careful to use the label rate, do not apply if daytime temperature is expected to reach 90° F or higher, and good soil moisture must be present. To get crabgrass control, a second application must be made 7 to 10 days later. Acclaim Extra is a newer and safer product, but it is not normally available on the homeowner market.