

Controlling crabgrass



Crabgrass is a common weed in many lawns. Crabgrass is an annual, warm-season grass that begins to germinate when soil temperatures reach 60°F. Crabgrass spreads quickly during the warm summer months. Between midsummer and early fall, each plant produces thousands of seeds. The first frost kills the plants, but the seeds remain dormant through the winter. When the ground temperature warms up, the seeds begin to grow. New crabgrass appears from mid-spring to midsummer. The key to crabgrass control is making sure the seeds cannot germinate. You can prevent crabgrass seeds from germinating in a number of ways.

Germination usually begins about mid-April in southern Ohio, early May in northern parts of the state. Crabgrass continues to germinate over several weeks from spring into summer. While crabgrass germination begins in the spring, it doesn't become highly visible in lawns until summer. Crabgrass is a low growing, spreading plant with light blue-green foliage. The leaf blades are approximately 1/4 inch wide. Seedheads appear as several finger-like projections atop upright stems. Crabgrass grows rapidly during warm summer weather. Growth slows with the arrival of cooler temperatures in late summer. Plants are destroyed with the first hard frost in the fall. However, before it dies a single crabgrass plant can produce up to 150,000 seeds.

The best way to prevent crabgrass infestations in lawns is to maintain a thick, healthy lawn through proper mowing, irrigation, and fertilization. Crabgrass will have a difficult time germinating and surviving in a thick turf. Gardeners who have had crabgrass problems in the past will need to apply preemergence herbicides in the spring. Preemergence herbicides must be applied before the seeds germinate and are not effective on emerged weeds. Several preemergence herbicides will control crabgrass in established lawns. These include benefin, bensulide, and pendimethalin. Often these herbicides are combined with a turf- type fertilizer. This allows the gardener to apply a preemergence herbicide and fertilizer with one application. If you intend to establish a new lawn from seed this spring, the only preemergence herbicide that can be used is siduron. This herbicide effectively controls crabgrass without affecting the germination of the turfgrass seeds.

The keys to successful control of crabgrass in lawns are correct timing of the preemergence herbicide application and proper application of the material. Preemergence herbicides must be applied before the crabgrass germinates. If the material is applied too early, the crabgrass that germinates late in the season will not be controlled. If applied too late, some crabgrass will have already germinated. Preemergence herbicides should normally be applied in early to mid-April in southern Ohio, mid-April to May 1 in central Ohio, and late April to early May in northern areas of the state. Weather often varies

considerable from year to year in Ohio. Accordingly, gardeners should make adjustments in the timing of the preemergence herbicide application. If the weather in March and April is consistently warmer than normal, apply the preemergence herbicide early in the normal time period. Apply the herbicide late in the recommended time period if Ohio is experiencing a cold early spring. If you're still uncertain as to when to apply the preemergence herbicide, Mother Nature does supply some helpful clues. Crabgrass seed germination usually coincides with the time forsythia blossoms start dropping or when redbud trees reach full bloom.

To insure the herbicide is applied properly, carefully read and follow the label directions on the package. Also, make sure the spreader has been correctly calibrated and is working properly.

This article originally appeared in the March 23, 1994 issue, pp. , 1994 issue, pp. 27-28. Controlling Crabgrass

| Grass Type | Mowing Height in Inches |
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| Mowing height depends on grass variety | |
| Bahiagrass | 2 to 3 |
| Bentgrass | ¼ to 1 |
| Bermuda Grass | ½ to 1.5 |
| Bluegrass | 1 to 3 |
| Buffalfo grass | 1.5 to 2 |
| Fescue | 1.5 to 3.5 |
| Annual Rye Grass | 1.5 to 2 |
| Perennial Rye Grass | 1.5 to 2.5 |
| Zoysiagrass | 1 to 2 |