

Controlling Weeds in the Lawn Now



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: If we put most of our time into concentrating on growing a healthy lawn and less time into killing weeds, we will usually find that the weeds have less opportunities to sprout in our lawn.

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Most of the weeds you see in March and April are winter annuals. They sprouted last fall, grew slowly through the winter, and now are peaking. Be patient and many of them will be gone by summer. Just keep them mowed so that they don't produce too many seed. And, if you really want to do something about them, mark your calendar for next fall when they are about to sprout again.

The atrazine herbicide, which is in most weed-and-feed fertilizers, won't do much against most of these full-grown winter weeds now. Atrazine is primarily a preemergence herbicide. So, if you apply a weed-and-feed containing atrazine in the spring, the main reason should be to stop the germination of summer weeds which are about to sprout. If you normally don't have many summer weeds, then don't go to the trouble of putting out atrazine in a weed-and-feed now. Just use a regular 15-0-15 fertilizer in April.

Next fall, October, is the time to apply atrazine to prevent the germination of the weeds you see out there now. But don't apply it in the form of a nitrogen-containing weed-and-feed (nitrogen is the first number in the fertilizer analysis). Nitrogen at that time can harm your warm-season lawn, which should be going dormant at that time of year.

If you insist on trying to kill those full-grown winter weeds that are out there right now, then you have a couple of possible choices. There are some postemergence herbicides containing a three-way mixture of 2,4-D amine + dicamba + MCPP and/or 2,4-DP. If the label of the herbicide says it can be used on centipede or St. Augustinegrass, you can proceed, but do so with caution. Use the product at the lowest recommended rate. It's better to apply a light rate and then make a repeat application 2-3 weeks later than to make one heavy

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application. Don't apply these products once the temperatures start climbing above eighty degrees.

There is also a product called Prompt, that is a combination of atrazine and bentazon. The bentazon adds a postemergence effect. This product will work better on emerged weeds than will atrazine alone. Check with a knowledgeable garden center sales person, and they may have some other postemergence herbicides available now, too. There are a few others, but none of them are likely to kill all the types of weeds you have now. Sorry, but there's just no silver bullet that will take out all those weeds and leave your lawngrass unscathed.

If you apply any herbicide on your lawn, take the time to read the label thoroughly and follow the directions carefully. Correct rate is very important and can make the difference between safely applying the herbicide and killing your lawn. Be aware that correct rate is not only determined by how much of the concentrate you mix in the spray tank but also by how much area you cover with the mixture. How much area you cover is determined by how fast you walk across the area as you spray.

Also, remember that if you have a lot of weeds, you may not have a lot of grass beneath. So, if you are successful at killing the weeds, expect to see bare spots in your lawn afterward. If you don't take good care of your grass so that it will fill those bare spots quickly, you will soon see more weeds filling those spots. Weeds are opportunists. If we put most of our time into concentrating on growing a healthy lawn and less time into killing weeds, we will usually find that the weeds have less opportunities to sprout in our lawn.

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