Control Summer Weeds in the Lawn in Late Winter

Did you have a bad weed problem in your lawn last summer? If not, then it’s probably best not to apply a herbicide to kill weeds. But if weeds were a major concern in your lawn last summer, the coming weeks are the time to apply a preemergence herbicide to prevent their emergence again this year.

Timing of a preemergence herbicide application for summer annual weeds such as crabgrass should be during mid February to March 1 when day temperatures reach 65°F to 70°F for four to five consecutive days. This generally coincides with the blooming of azaleas, dogwoods and forsythias. Note: This is not true for chamberbitter, the common summer weed that somewhat resembles a little mimosa seedling with seed pods lining the underside of the leaves. Chamberbitter requires warmer soil temperatures to germinate. Begin applying a preemergence herbicide around May 1st when battling this weed. If you wait until you see weeds, most preemergent type herbicides won’t work. You must apply the product just before the seeds germinate.

The weeds you’ll see in your yard now and in March are not summer annuals. They’re winter annuals. They will grow rapidly in March and then die as the weather becomes warmer. They are difficult to kill with herbicides at this stage of maturity.
However, summer annual weeds aren’t up and growing yet. A typical summer annual weed germinates from a seed in spring, grows during spring and summer, produces flowers followed by seeds and then is killed by cold weather in fall or early winter. Summer annual weed seeds are still dormant now awaiting warmer spring temperatures to germinate.

Summer annual weeds include crabgrass, Florida pusley, chamberbitter, sandspur, old world diamond-flower and spotted spurge. There are others.

If your lawn has a history of summer annual weeds, one control option is to apply a preemergence herbicide. But remember, timing is critical in order for preemergence herbicides to work.

Some preemergence herbicides to look for include oryzalin (Surflan), benefin (Sta-green Crabgrass Preventer, Hi-Yield Crabgrass Preventer), pendimethalin (Pre-M, Pendulum, Turf Weedgrass Control, Halts Crabgrass Preventer), benefin + oryzalin (XL), DCPA (Dacthal) and bensulide (Green Light Betasan Crabgrass Preventer).

For season-long weed control, a second application should be made about nine weeks after the initial application. To activate some products, irrigation or rain may be necessary following application. Because many preemergence products may interfere with lawngrass seed germination, delay reseeding six to sixteen weeks after application.

Overuse of some types of preemergence herbicides can cause your lawn grass to produce short stubby weak roots. So as is true with all pesticides, only apply the product if there is a pest to control – in this case, if you have had a history of summer annual weeds. Otherwise, save your money and time. It is the user's responsibility to read and follow all label directions and precautions when using any pesticide, including herbicides.

For additional information on lawn weeds, go to http://turf.ufl.edu, click on “Residential Landscapes” and then click on “Weed Management.”

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