

**Friday's Feature****By****Theresa Friday**

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**Using weed killers in the heat may result in damage**

Lawn weeds drive some people up the wall, while others couldn't care less as long the yard is green. Unless a lawn is properly maintained, weeds will creep in.

The surest method to keep out weeds is to maintain a healthy lawn that provides consistent coverage. As soon as the desirable grass thins or dies out, undesirable weeds will immediately occupy the ground — nature abhors a blank spot.

Weeds can be indicators of problems. Often, the presence of specific weeds in turf provides clues to the type of environmental and management problems. By learning about weeds that commonly occur under certain conditions, gardeners can more easily identify these problems and correct them.

Crabgrass, for example, is a good indicator of compacted soils, overfertilization, low mowing height, or poorly drained soils — or a combination of these factors. Heavy dollarweed infestations are often the result of mowing too low, failure to manage diseases like large patch and/or the soil being too wet. Red sorrel may indicate an acid soil and plantains may indicate an alkaline soil. An abundance of spotted spurge and Florida pusley may indicate nematode issues.



*Dichondra (left) and dollarweed (right) look similar.*

*However, dichondra grows on drier sites while dollarweed grows on wetter sites.*

*Photo credit: University of Florida*

The presence of an indicator weed suggests a condition but is not proof of a condition. Contact your local Extension Office for confirmation of a problem.

There are three primary methods of controlling weeds. Any one method, when used alone, will not usually

control all of your weeds. To consistently control weeds you must use a combination of all three practices.

The first method is cultural. Maintain a healthy lawn by watering, fertilizing and mowing properly. For more information on recommended cultural practices for our Florida lawn grasses, visit <http://yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

The next method is mechanical. Many weed species do not tolerate frequent mowing. Adhere to the mowing frequency and cutting height guidelines developed by experts to limit the development of weeds. Hand pulling annual weeds is effective; however, in our summer heat, this may be difficult. Nevertheless, hand pulling a strange or new weed when it first appears in the lawn will help to prevent the spread of that weed later this year.

The third method, and last resort, is chemical. Herbicides are chemicals that are used to control the growth and development of a weed. As it gets hotter, we should be very careful what chemicals we use on our lawns, since they also can cause dead or stressed areas.

If applying herbicides make sure the lawn is not under moisture stress (received water within the last 24-48 hours), and that the chemical being used is not applied during the hottest part of the day (1-3 PM). Some herbicides cannot be used when the temperature is above 85 degrees F.

Because using weed killers can be tricky this time of year, you may want to avoid using them during the months of July and August unless you are really careful with the equipment calibration and application rates.

While gardening enthusiasts may tire of hearing it --the label is the law. Read and follow all instructions before buying and before using any pesticide. Know what the weed is that you are aiming to kill. Be sure that the product says that it can be used where you intend to apply it

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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