Friday’s Feature  
By  
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Summer weed control begins now  

Weeds can be a gardener’s worst nightmare. To help keep them in check, you can use pre-emergence herbicide products.

To get maximum effect from a pre-emergence herbicide, it must be applied at the right time. Timing is everything in gardening especially when it comes to controlling weeds in your lawn.

Being late-February, most weeds that are currently growing in your lawn are probably winter weeds. They germinated last fall, remained small through mid-winter, and are now making rapid vegetative growth. Soon, they will begin flowering and going to seed. Winter weeds begin to decline as hot weather arrives. The summer weeds, on the other hand, have not yet begun to germinate. So now is the time to get a head start on controlling bothersome summer weeds.

The first and best method of weed control begins with proper management practices that encourage a dense, thriving turf. Healthy turf shades the soil so sunlight can’t reach weed seeds that are ready to germinate. A thick turf also minimizes the physical space available for weeds to become established. Proper mowing, fertilizing and watering will promote a healthy, dense grass.

Pre-emergence herbicides are applied before weed seed germination. If these chemicals are applied after weed emergence, they will have little or no effect. There is a narrow window of time when pre-emergence herbicides can be applied for maximum effect. If you wait too long to apply them, they will either damage your lawn or fail to work on the weeds.

Timing of a pre-emergence herbicide application for summer annual weeds such as crabgrass should be between February 15 and March 5 or when day temperatures reach 65° to 70°F for four to five consecutive days. This generally coincides with the blooming of azaleas and dogwoods.

Pre-emergence herbicides work by creating a chemical barrier in the soil/thatch layer. Therefore, uniform coverage is necessary for optimum control. Large gaps in the herbicide-treated zone can result in weeds popping up.
Pre-emergence herbicides are generally effective in controlling weeds from six to twelve weeks following application. Most will begin to degrade when exposed to the environment. Therefore, to obtain season-long control, an additional application should follow six to nine weeks after the initial one.

Some pre-emergence herbicides to look for include dithiopyr (Vigoro Weed Stop); oryzalin (Surflan); or pendimethalin (Lesco PRE-M). Be sure to read and follow label directions.

After doing a quick survey at local stores, it’s very hard to find just a pre-emergence herbicide. What you will find are products that are combinations of high-nitrogen fertilizer and herbicides, commonly known as weed-n-feeds.

It is still too early to apply a nitrogen-containing fertilizer on our mostly-dormant lawns in Northwest Florida. Adding nitrogen now will fertilizer your existing weeds. It may also stimulate the grass which makes it more susceptible to winter kill when we get our next cold snap. In general, it’s best to apply your herbicides separately from fertilizers.

It’s all in the timing. Pre-emergence herbicides should go down very soon, but most lawns should wait until April for their spring fertilization.

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

Theresa Friday is the Environmental 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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