



April 5, 2013

TIME TO OVERSEED DROUGHT DAMAGED YARDS

Most of our lawns this year have spots or areas in bad shape or areas looking pretty thin coming out of dormancy. I have some areas in my yard where the cool season turf type fescue went permanently dormant and remnants of bluegrass remain! If we don't seed this spring, Mother Nature has its way of covering the thin areas of the lawn with crabgrass and weeds. April is the time for spring seeding of cool season turfgrasses. There are different approaches to overseeding your lawn.

If there are smaller areas, one method is to aggressively use a hand rake to remove dead grass to expose the soil to get good seed to soil contact. Grass seed that lands on surface thatch will not germinate and take very well. Because of the drought damaged turf, I would not recommend a power raking because of the damage to the turf trying to recover right now. A second method is a slicer seeding machine that essentially no-tills the grass seed mixture into the soil surface. A third method is to overseed after core aeration which can be effective for large areas.

Aerification is an important practice to use, even on drought stressed lawns. A moist soil, after a spring rain or turf irrigation, is needed for effective core aeration. The removal of plugs and reduction of soil compaction will encourage root growth to aid recovery from last year's heat and drought stress. To increase your overseeding success, and increase seed soil contact with core aerification prior to seeding, mix the seed with fine compost, or after seeding spread a light layer of compost over the area and rake it into aeration holes. The new grass seed will grow up right through the aerification holes in the lawn.

Remember that crabgrass preventer can prevent germination of grass seed. The only labeled pre-emergence herbicide for homeowners is siduron (Tupersan). This is the only homeowner pre-emergence herbicide that can be applied for control of annual weeds without impacting cool season turfgrass seedlings. Professionals can use mesotrione (Tenacity) in the seedbed. Tenacity herbicide is a new more environmentally friendly herbicide that can remove existing weeds at seeding, provide residual control to keep them out, and can also selectively remove nimblewill, crabgrass, and other difficult-to-control weeds. Post-emergence broadleaf herbicides like Weed-B-Gon or Trimec can hurt germination so read the label. These products generally need to be delayed on newly emerged grass until after the first mowing.

Try to avoid early fertilization. For homeowners who apply their own products, the first fertilization is best made around mid-May after the spring growth flush. However, most pre-emergence herbicides for crabgrass are combined with fertilizer and these need to be applied sometime between April 20th and May 5th. Since high rates of N applied at this date are not ideal for turf, it is recommended to purchase products with low N and or mostly slow release N when applying the crabgrass preventer.

Crabgrass (or what some people call watergrass) is a warm-season annual that begins germination after soil temperatures are at least above 57°F to 64°F at a one-inch depth. This usually occurs sometime in May. Late April to early May is the ideal time to apply pre-emergence herbicides for



crabgrass if only a single application will be made. Sequential applications will improve control over single applications. If sequential applications will be made, the first application can be made almost any time in the early spring and the second application made in early- to mid-June. Recent research indicates the same active ingredient is not required for both applications and any of the pre-emergence herbicides can be used for the first and/or second application as long as one-half of the high label rate of each product is used.

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