

*Yard and Garden – October 13-2012 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant*

I recently received a call asking me if it was too late to control dandelions in the lawn. “Absolutely not,” was my response. Although autumn is generally the time of year when we think about relaxing from most gardening activities, the opposite is true when it comes to controlling problematic weeds such as dandelions. Weed control—and particularly broadleaf, perennial weed control—should now be at the top of a gardener’s “things to do” list. Although I’ve addressed this topic in years past, due to its timely nature, once again it’s worthy to revisit.

Common, perennial, broadleaf weeds that one may find growing in one’s lawn may include dandelion, ground ivy, white clover, black medic, plantain lily, wild violet, mouse ear chickweed, bindweed and yellow woodsorrel.

The two key words listed above are *broadleaf* and *perennial*. Botanically speaking, broadleaf plants are dicotyledons—those plants having two seedling leaves called cotyledons. However, more simply stated, broadleaf plants have leaves that are wide in shape and do not resemble blades of grass. A perennial is a plant capable of living more than two seasons, returning year after year from its root stock.

Interestingly, both broadleaf perennial weeds and broadleaf annual weeds exist. Since annuals live only for one season, there is no reason to be concerned with their control at this time. Frost has or will be killing them.

Although frost will destroy the above ground vegetation in both annual and perennial weeds, unlike annual weeds, perennial weeds are capable of surviving the winter. For a perennial weed to survive, it is crucial that it stores enough food in its root system to provide the energy needed for regrowth the following spring. Perennial weeds are currently channeling their energies in a downward direction to their root system. During the growing season, those stored energies are then directed in an upward direction for new vegetative growth. Now is the opportune time to take advantage of this downward metabolic process.

Applying the proper herbicide now to perennial, broad leaf weeds will cause the toxic chemical to be absorbed into the plants’ tissues and trans-located the root systems. During the winter months, the toxin will quietly and effectively destroy the weeds.

It is a well-known fact that weeds are opportunistic. They readily invade lawns where proper cultural care was ignored. Presently, little can be accomplished with cultural care such as mowing and watering; therefore, if perennial weeds persist, using the proper herbicide can be effective.

The presence of perennial weeds such as those listed above prescribes the use of a post-emergent, selective herbicide. Post-emergent herbicides are designed to destroy weeds that are currently growing contrasted with a pre-emergent herbicide used to prevent weed seeds from germinating. A selective herbicide is designed to target specific weeds rather than a non-selective herbicide, such as Roundup® that kills all green plant life.

Two post-emergent, selective herbicides that effectively kill broadleaf perennial weeds and are designed for use in turf grass are 2, 4-D and triclopyr. Both chemicals are sold under an assortment of trade names. For that reason, it is always wise to check the active ingredients on the label as well as what weeds the product is designed to destroy. Another compelling reason to read the label is for proper application directions.

Interestingly, even though we have experienced frost, research has shown that both of these chemicals work better following the first fall frost. Recent studies at Purdue University indicate that triclopyr is very effective in controlling ground ivy, one of the more difficult perennial weeds. Triclopyr retains its effectiveness destroying ground ivy regardless of the first frost date and can be effective if applied as late as early to mid-November.

Autumn is in full swing. Even though relaxing from gardening chores is on your mind, I urge you to take a moment and examine your lawn for broadleaf perennial weeds. Now is the best time to control dandelion, ground ivy, white clover, black medic, plantain lily, wild violet, mouse ear chickweed, bindweed and yellow woodsorrel with a selective, post emergent herbicide.