

If your lawn wasn't devastated by disease, drought, or devouring insects, consider yourself fortunate. Renovation may not be necessary. However, even for you, autumn is the opportune time to address a few turf maintenance chores.

I have often wondered why the herbicide industry always touts treating for dandelions in the spring of the year. Perhaps it is the sight of those bright yellow flowers contrasting against our emerald green lawns that madly motivates us homeowners into buying and applying herbicides in the spring. After all, "Strike while the iron's hot!"

Currently dandelions are out of sight, and more than likely out of mind; however, did you know that now is the perfect time for control? Furthermore, using a broadleaf herbicide now will also rid your lawn of other perennial weeds including white clover, black medic, and wild violets. September 15 through October 31 is the prime time to treat and control perennial broadleaf weeds.

In the spring of the year, dandelions as well as other perennial weeds are growing quickly, devoting all their energies in an upward direction. Perhaps you may have noticed that after treating dandelions in the spring, little, if any, control is achieved. All too often, the dandelions simply end up distorted in shape, twisting and bending; yet surviving, capable of flowering and producing seeds.

During late summer, early autumn, dandelions and other broadleaf perennials are devoting their energies in a downward direction. They are preparing for dormancy. Food produced by the leaves is being stored in the roots, which will serve as the energy source needed for re-emergence next spring. Applying an herbicide now insures a good kill. The toxic chemical is readily absorbed by the plant and transported to the roots where it silently and successfully kills the weed.

The standard post-emergent herbicide used against most broadleaf weeds is 2, 4-D. When used in the spring or during the summer months, because of its volatility, 2, 4-D can readily cause accidental injury to tender new growth of numerous desirable broadleaf plants. Rarely does that problem occur if 2, 4-D is applied now when outdoor temperatures are cooler and minimal new growth is taking place.

Always, follow label directions when using herbicides and target only the undesirable broadleaf weeds. Apply on days when temperatures are expected not to exceed 75° F and when there is very little or no wind. Furthermore, in order for the herbicide to be effective, it must be applied a minimum of 24 hours in advance of rain.

Most winter annual weeds germinate in late summer or fall, survive through the winter and grow quickly in the spring. They produce seed and die by late spring or early summer. Speedwell, henbit, and chickweed are common examples of winter annuals. A pre-emergent such as Pendimethalin applied in the fall before seeds germinate is an excellent means of control. Keep in mind, if you are planning to overseed your lawn, one should not use a pre-emergent. Such an herbicide not only prevents the weed seeds from germinating but also the grass seed.

If your lawn has been compacted by heavy traffic, or you notice it doesn't drain as quickly as it once did, it is likely your lawn needs aeration. Core aeration mechanically removes small plugs of soil and thatch from the lawn to provide for air, nutrients and water to reach the roots more easily. September 1 through October 15 is the recommended period for aeration. Normally, annual aeration is sufficient for a good healthy lawn.

Fertilizing is another autumn maintenance chore, but since it is usually completed from October 15 to November 15, I will reserve its discussion for a future column.

Feel fortunate if lawn renovation is not in your plans; however, don't ignore other autumn turf maintenance chores. They're the prelude to next summer's beautiful lawn.