

Yard and Garden – 09-28-2013- Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

Avoid the trap — out of sight, out of mind. Each spring I am flooded with calls from homeowners asking what herbicides I recommend for controlling broadleaf weeds such as dandelions. I understand their urgency. After all, bright-yellow, unwanted flowers are popping up everywhere. Did you know, if dandelions were blooming in your lawn last May, chances are they are still there? Right now dandelions are out of sight, but let's hope, after reading this column, not out of mind. The fact is now is the opportune time to control dandelions as well as many other weeds.

First and foremost, the best method for minimizing weeds in the lawn is maintaining healthy, actively growing turf. When this doesn't occur, weeds are opportunistic. Dandelions and other weeds produce hundreds to thousands of seeds yearly. Carried by wind, dandelion seeds invade the lawn, and if given the opportunity, establish a foothold. During the first year, we might refer to them as annual weeds; however, dandelions and others, including white clover, wild violets and ground ivy, have the ability to come back the following season from their rootstock. These weeds are classified as perennial broadleaf weeds.

Herbicide control of these perennial broadleaf weeds is most successful during fall. From late September through October is the perfect time to apply herbicides. For difficult to control weeds like ground ivy and violets, two applications may be needed. Apply one in September and the second in October.

One might ask, "Why is fall treatment better than spring?" In autumn, perennial broadleaf weeds are preparing for winter. The plant's energy reserves are moving from the leaves down to the roots. If herbicides are applied at this time, the toxin will translocate to the roots resulting in death to the weed.

Three-way herbicides (2,4D + MCPP + dicamba), triclopyr, or fluroxypyr are most effective. By applying multiple active ingredients, a wider range of broadleaf weeds can be controlled. To ensure proper control and safety, always read, understand and follow all herbicide label directions. To guarantee better success when applying herbicides, include the following:

- Spot apply herbicides when only a few weeds are present.
- Always apply herbicides on a calm, clear day when air temperatures are between 50° F and 80° F.
- Herbicide control is less effective when weeds are treated under low soil moisture. It is good to water the lawn thoroughly the day before treatment.
- If it rains within 24 hours of herbicide application, it may be necessary to reapply if results are not obvious after ten days.
- Avoid applying herbicides over new turfgrass seedlings until the grass has been mowed at least three times.
- Wait to apply an herbicide to newly sodded areas for 4 to 6 weeks.
- Avoid mowing treated areas for at least 2 days before and after the treatment.

In addition to treating perennial, broadleaf weeds, fall is a good time for controlling winter annual broadleaf weeds. Henbit, chickweed, and sheperdspurse, are all examples of winter annual broadleaf weeds. Since the seeds of these weeds germinate in the fall, the timing of herbicide application is similar for perennial broadleaf weeds. Furthermore, application of herbicides in the spring for winter annual broadleaf weeds is not necessary since the weeds are near the end of their life cycle.

For now, ignore summer annual weeds, particularly grasses like crabgrass, goose grass, sandburs or other summer annual broadleaf weeds. Post- emergence herbicide control at this time of year may kill the plant, but will have no effect on the seed. As annual plants, these weeds will die with the first freeze. Next year, apply pre-emergence herbicides at the correct time of the spring/early summer for effective control.

For controlling broadleaf summer annual weeds including spurge, knotweed, purslane and oxalis, apply a pre-emergence herbicide containing isoxaben in April before the seeds germinate. For those seeds that have already germinated, one may need to apply a post-emergent herbicide containing 2,4D, MCP, and/or dicamba. Summer annual broadleaf weeds can be difficult to control. Good cultural turf practices are the first line of defense in minimizing summer annual weeds.

As I began, avoid the trap —out of sight, out of mind. Now is the time to control dandelions, white clover, wild violets, ground ivy, henbit, chickweed, shepherdspurse, and numerous other perennial broad leaf weeds and winter annual broadleaf weeds.