



Warm weather and timely rains means two things. Spring is here. Weeds aren't far behind. Find out what you can do now to help prevent weeds from taking over your lawn this year.

Crabgrass is the main target for early season preemergence herbicides in turf. It needs a minimum soil temperature of 50 to 55 degrees to germinate. Normally, that soil temperature is reached the end of April or the beginning of May. To see what the soil temperatures are in your area, you can visit <http://cropwatch.unl.edu/cropwatchsoiltemperature>. Keep in mind that these soil temperatures are taken on bare soil, which warms up quicker than soil covered by turf.

Don't get into too big of a hurry to apply the preemergence herbicides. If crabgrass does happen to germinate before April 15th, there is a chance that the little seedlings could get hit by frost. Our average frost-free date in Central Nebraska is around Mother's Day, so there is a good chance for at least one more frost yet this spring. Don't let air temperatures fool you, it's the soil temperatures that matters. The soil will warm up slower than the air temperatures. Just because we might have several nice days in a row, doesn't mean the soil temperatures are increasing rapidly. Always check the average soil temperatures at the 4" depth to be sure.

Preemergence herbicides are designed to prevent seeds from sprouting. The three most common active ingredients in preemergence herbicides are dithiopyr, pendimethalin, or prodiamine. When choosing a product to control crabgrass, look for one of those active ingredients. Once a plant is up and actively growing, not all preemergence herbicides will work. Products containing prodiamine or pendimethalin may control one-leaf crabgrass if watered in immediately following the application, but should be applied before germination for optimum control. Dithiopyr will control crabgrass before tillering, sprouting off-shoots, and can be applied later than the previous products. Be sure to water in the products after application to keep it from degrading in the sun.

Split applications of preemergence herbicides will allow for extended control. Aim to put down half the highest recommended application rate on the label when the soils are close to 50 degrees and the other half in 6-8 weeks later. This allows for a longer season of control for weeds. One application now probably won't last throughout the entire growing season.

There is one major reason for holding off on applying preemergence herbicides. These products can limit your options when it comes to a lush green lawn yet this spring. If a preemergence herbicide has been applied to the turf prior to overseeding, it can keep the turf seeds from germinating along with the weedy seeds.

If your lawn has suffered this winter or been killed by winterkill, there is still time to overseed yet this spring. Overseeding or renovating lawns can help to fill in a sparsely growing lawn or one suffering from winterkill. If you decide to overseed, there are a few rules to follow. Kentucky bluegrass can be overseeded throughout the month of April at a rate of .75 to 1 pound of seed per 1,000 square feet. Tall fescue lawns that have been thinned can be overseeded at a rate of 4 to 6 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet starting April 15 through June 15th. If renovation of the entire lawn is selected, use the full seeding rate. Kentucky bluegrass's full rate is 3 to 4 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet. Tall fescue seeding rate is 4 to 6 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet.

Take advantage of the warm weather, check your soil temperatures, and prepare to do battle against crabgrass.

Elizabeth Exstrom is the Horticulture Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension in Hall County. For more information contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.exstrom@unl.edu, her blog at <http://huskerhort.com/>, or HuskerHort on Facebook and Twitter.