



The saying, “Timing is everything,” could never be more true. Proper timing of herbicide applications can not only save you the frustration of having a lawn full of weeds, but it can also lead to better control of those pesky plants. Properly identifying the weed and knowing its life cycle is helpful in selecting the best control method for the greatest results.

Knowing the type of plant you are dealing with is crucial in its control. Annual weeds require a little different approach than perennial weeds. Annual weeds are those that sprout, grow, set seed, and die all within a year. Annual weeds fall into one of three categories. There are the spring annuals, like crabgrass; summer annuals, like knotweed or sandbur; and winter annuals, like henbit. Each one has a different set of temperatures and requirements it needs in order to germinate. Perennial weeds continue to come up year after year from the crown of the plant, like clover and ground ivy.

There are several options for control of weeds. Knowing the plants’ life cycle and when it germinates will help in the timing of herbicide applications. Preemergence herbicides keep the seeds from germinating, or sprouting, which keeps the weeds from becoming a problem. Preemergent herbicides are usually used to prevent annual weeds. Once the seeds have germinated, the preemergence herbicides are not as effective at controlling the growing weeds. Preemergence herbicides are not effective in controlling perennial weeds because they come back from the crown every year, not from seeds.

Postemergence herbicides or hand removal are two common methods of control once a weed has germinated. Timing of postemergent control is just as important as the timing of preemergence herbicide. Early season control of many weeds can give you better efficacy. Summer applications of broadleaf weed killers might just burn back some perennial weeds for a little while, only to have it regrow new leaves a little while later. Later season applications to annual weeds might make you feel better, but it might only kill the plant a month earlier than it normally would have died due to frost and it could still drop its seeds.

Manually removing the weed may require a little elbow grease, but it is an effective method of control. Hand pulling or digging will also take a little time. Aim to get the whole root system if possible. If you have a large area that has too many weeds and needs complete rejuvenation, solarization might be the route for you. With solarization, clear plastic is placed over the area for several months and the ground is ‘baked’ in the hot summer sun to kill seeds or crowns.

There are some products that can be affected by the heat. Some broadleaf weed killers, like 2, 4-D, in the heat can volatilize, or switch from a liquid to a gas. When this happens, the product that was applied to the weed can drift over and damage nearby sensitive plant material. The most common indicators in the garden are peppers, grapes, potatoes, redbud, and tomatoes. Symptoms can be leaf yellowing, distortion, and cupping upward of the leaf. Sometimes the herbicides can also cause a twisting, curly-q appearance to stems and petioles, leaf stems. To prevent herbicide damage, avoid applying herbicides for weed control during the hottest months to sidestep injury to non-target plants.

Proper timing, identification, and selecting the right method are the secrets for good weed control. With a little luck, your weeds might have met their match.

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