

Sometimes, it's nice to think about how there are some things in life that we can always rely on. Friends and family, Nebraska sunsets will always be prettier than anywhere else, and there will always be crabgrass seed in your lawn. Okay, maybe that last one isn't as nice to think about, but there is something that we can do about it.

When most people call and ask about applying a pre-emergent herbicide for crabgrass, they ask me for a specific date or time frame for application. But as with most chemical treatments, it varies every year because of a few different factors, the main ones being the soil temperature, and the weather. On average in Nebraska, this time frame is around April fifteenth to May first, but it can change depending on the year. Crabgrass germinates when the soil temperature has been fifty-five degrees or above consistently at four inches deep in the soil, for multiple days in a row. This means that a treatment to control crabgrass should also be applied during this time, because if the window when crabgrass is germinating is missed, a pre-emergent herbicide will no longer be effective on the crabgrass. Pre-emergent herbicides will not kill weeds that have already emerged. There are several services that monitor soil temperatures around Nebraska, so if you don't have a soil temperature probe handy, Nebraska Extension's Crop watch has a soil temperature map with the daily and weekly averages of the soil temperatures. As of Tuesday, April 14th, we're sitting at about forty-eight degrees as a weekly average, so if you haven't a crabgrass preventative treatment and would like to do so, you aren't too late this year.

Whenever you are applying a pre-emergent herbicide, you need to be very careful with where you apply it, and what is going on in that location when you apply it. If you have just reseeded your lawn, or plan on doing so, do not apply a pre-emergent herbicide. It will kill any grass seedlings that germinate, affecting how well the grass seed will fill the lawn in. Pre-emergent herbicides don't kill the seeds, they kill the newly germinated plant when it comes into contact with the herbicide. While I can't recommend specific brands, some of the chemical names to look for in the active ingredient are trifluralin, benefin, dithiopyr, pendimethalin, and prodiamine. It is also a good practice to check the label to make sure that product is meant for treating crabgrass. As always, follow the directions on the label.

A second treatment in about the midsummer may be necessary to continue to prevent weeds from emerging and causing problems. Pre-emergent herbicides can work very well in already established flower beds to keep the weeds at bay. Some pre-emergent herbicides are labeled for use in vegetable gardens, which could cut down on the time that you spend weeding. I know that is how I spent most of my time in the garden most years, maybe this year can look a little different.

Most crabgrass preventative treatments function as pre-emergent herbicides. These kinds of treatments kill the seedlings shortly after they germinate. For it to be the most effective, soil temperatures should be fifty-five or above for several days in a row, as this is when crabgrass starts to germinate. On average in Nebraska, this is around the fifteenth of April to the first of May. But temperatures should be monitored, as we all know how variable the weather in Nebraska can be. Always read and follow the directions on the label when you use any chemical. If you have any questions or would like to suggest a topic for me to write about, feel free to contact me at the Buffalo County Extension Office, at 308-236-1235, or mearnest2@unl.edu.