

HOW CAN I GET A WEED FREE LAWN?

One thing most homeowners strive for is a nice green, weed-free lawn. There are really no silver bullets or magic formulas to accomplish this goal. People can have weed-free lawns, but it isn't going to happen overnight. Here in Nebraska, our climate has a lot to do with creating the environment that impacts how good of a lawn you have. If you don't have irrigation for your lawn, periods of hot, dry weather during the summer can definitely have a negative impact on your lawn, particularly if your lawn is seeded to a cool-season grass. Certain grasses withstand drought stress better than others and go dormant during the heat of the summer, but sometimes patches in your lawn die or grass dies throughout your lawn and it thins out. With last year's drought conditions, many lawns were severely damaged will reseeding some areas will probably be necessary. Sometimes in Nebraska we get too much rain. This creates an environment in your lawn for diseases to develop and spread. Sometimes under severe conditions and if left untreated, you can also lose an area of your lawn from a disease. Both of these situations will allow for weeds to germinate and fill in the thin or bare spots in your lawn.

What are some tips I can do to prevent this from happening? A dense stand of healthy grass will prevent weeds from invading your lawn. Weeds are "opportunists" they will grow in thin areas of the lawn. "Overseed" bare spots to get complete coverage or you may want to consider annual over seeding of the entire lawn to be the single best weed prevention you can have. Maintaining a healthy lawn by proper fertilizing, watering and mowing is your first line of defense in controlling weeds. Take soil samples and send them into a soil testing lab. The test will show your nutrient and pH levels, and how much organic matter is present. Use the results to determine what fertilizer is needed to maintain correct levels for growing grass. In spring and fall, consider spreading about 1/4 to 1/2 inch of compost over the existing grass to provide nutrients. In regard to mowing, sharpen your lawn mower blade at least once a year and keep your lawn mower at higher settings during the summer months; the higher grass shades out weeds.

If your lawn has become thin through neglect or weather-related reasons, you might need another level of weed control. Pre-emergent herbicides control weeds by forming a barrier that prevents the seed from germinating. First, identify the type of weed you need to control. Grassy weeds, such as crabgrass may cause problems in lawns during the summer. These are annuals that emerge from seed each spring, usually in May or early June depending upon the weather. These grassy weeds can be controlled with pre-emergent herbicides applied in late April to early May. If you have re-seeded parts of your lawn, there are some pre-emergence herbicides you will not be able to use in these areas. Be sure to check the pesticide label before use. Perennial weeds, such as dandelion are better controlled with a contact post-emergent selective herbicide in the fall, although spot spraying these weeds with a non-selective herbicide such as Roundup[®]

can be effective as well. Treatment of herbicides in the fall is more effective because perennial plants are in transition to carbohydrates downward to their roots during this time of year. This information is provided by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.

year and the herbicides will be translocated as well. Some perennials are difficult to control and will take multiple applications. There are a number of annuals that will invade your lawn if given the opportunity. These weeds generally can be controlled with contact herbicides, and henbit, a winter annual can be controlled by a pre-emergent herbicide by an early fall application in September. Label recommendations should be followed for all herbicides.

Be patient--it may take several years to achieve a maintenance-free lawn. If you can develop a dense stand of healthy turf, it will prevent weeds from invading and reduce the need to de-thatch and aerate your lawn. You may even be able to eliminate the use of herbicides on your lawn. If you have questions on your lawns or specific weeds, feel free to contact me at the Nemaha County Extension Office at (402) 274-4755.

Gary Lesoing
Extension Educator
Nemaha County
April 2013