

Yellow Nutsedge

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Yellow nutsedge is a prolific weed in lawns and landscape beds. Once established, it can take a number of years to control. Because it is a sedge and not a true grass or broadleaf plant, it requires specific control methods. Common names include watergrass and nut grass.

Weed identification is always important for effective management but especially for nutsedge. Yellow nutsedge looks like a shiny yellowish-green grass. The plants grow upright with waxy blades that are arranged in sets of three. Stems are triangular and solid, not hollow.

In turf, it is noticeable because of its color and fast growth. It is almost always taller than turfgrass except immediately after mowing. In garden or landscape beds, it will emerge through wood or rock mulches and landscape fabrics.

Yellow nutsedge thrives in waterlogged soil and its presence indicates poor drainage, excessive irrigation frequency, or damaged and leaking sprinklers or valves. Once established, it does fine with no irrigation and has survived prolonged drought, which is why it is problematic even in dry years.

Another reason it is persistent is it reproduces by underground rhizomes and organs called tubers. These are incorrectly referred to as nutlets. Tubers are produced on rhizomes which are spreading stems. One plant can produce as many as 15. Most tubers are in the upper six inches of soil and survive one to three years. Individual plants can eventually form patches up to 10 feet in diameter.

Yellow nutsedge is a perennial that can live for many years. Leaves die to the ground each fall, but rhizomes survive in soil to regrow the next season along with tubers sprouting to produce new plants. Nutsedge spreads by rhizomes and tubers and very little by seed.

To discourage yellow nutsedge, use practices that increase turf density. Mow often at three and a half inches tall, use late summer fertilization, and core aerate often to relieve soil compaction and improve drainage.

Lawns watered for a brief period a few times a week are more likely to have nutsedge problems than those watered deep and infrequently. Turn off automatic irrigation and only turn it on when soil is becoming dry or turfgrass shows signs of needing water. When needed, moisten soil six inches deep and then shut off the system.

To control yellow nutsedge, homeowners need to be as persistent as the weed. Control in one season is very unlikely. For those who prefer not to use herbicides, promote turf density and use continuous hand-pulling, especially prior to June 21. If done in early June, plants will have not yet produced tubers.

If herbicides are used, products labeled for sedges need to be used according to label direction and application to infested areas need to begin in early to mid-June. After June 21, controls stimulate tuber sprouting and continued hand-pulling or herbicide use is needed.

Halosulfuron, sold to homeowners in the product Sedgehammer, is one herbicide to use in lawns. Sulfentrazone is also effective and available to homeowners in products like Bonide Sedge Ender or Ortho Sedge Killer. Sulfentrazone also provides some preemergence control of tubers. As they sprout and just begin to grow, the chemical kills them.

These two chemicals are not labeled for use in landscape beds or flower gardens. In these areas, hand-pulling or spot treating yellow nutsedge with glyphosate (Roundup) are control methods to use.