



April 7, 2017

CAN YOU SKIP THE PRE IN A HOME LAWN?

You know spring is here when I start talking about crabgrass preventers in home lawns. This is the most common invasive weed in our home lawns. Pre-emerge herbicides or “PRE” products for home lawns prevent crabgrass seeds from developing into mature plants and usually there is a lot of confusion about how these herbicides work. They don’t actually prevent the seed from germinating but rather the germinating plant takes up some of the herbicide that is in soil solution and is killed as a tiny seedling. Crabgrass preventers are just that, preventers.

Skip the PRE if you are trying to establish turf. This includes dormant seeding in winter and seeding (or even sodding) this spring. The various crabgrass preventers available at hardware stores often include the active ingredients pendimethalin (same active ingredient as in Prowl herbicide), prodiamine (Barricade), or dithiopyr (Dimension). Each of these herbicides will prevent germination of desirable lawn species, restrict rooting of newly laid sod, and will injure new seedlings if applied too soon after seeding. Remember only the active ingredients siduron (Tupersan) or mesotrione (Tanacity) can safely be used when establishing tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass and are priced accordingly.

Skip the PRE application if you already have a great lawn. Instead pat yourself on the back! The best “herbicide” is a healthy, dense lawn free of voids that allow weeds to establish. In this case, a few crabgrass plants may emerge in isolated areas if you skip PRE this year, but these plants are easily controlled by hand weeding or with post emergence herbicides. Or maybe you only need to spot treat along the curb or driveway or in areas you noticed last year. Crabgrass will not take over a healthy, thick lawn.

Our turf experts at UNL recommend making the first spring PRE application for control of crabgrass when the soil temperature at a 1 inch depth is $> 55^{\circ}$ F for five days. A useful soil temperature map for homeowners and farmers is at:

<http://cropwatch.unl.edu/cropwatchsoiltemperature>

Crabgrass and other annual grasses like foxtail, barnyardgrass, and goosegrass begin their germination. Therefore, after April 15 and by May 1, for most years, would be a good target date for applying the preventer; this gives you the most “bang for your buck” and gives the active ingredients some time to evenly disperse in the soil before crabgrass germination starts. Commercial products like Dimension or Barricade last longer in the soil so they have a wider application window and are now in the homeowner market.

Recently a homeowner sent a label to me that said “lasts up to 6 months” in very large letters and the active ingredient was dithiopyr (Dimension). If you read and follow the label only the highest application rate allowed would last up to that long and of course is the most expensive application rate option.



Barricade can even be applied in the fall for crabgrass control the next season. Dimension can be applied as early as March 1. Because of the added flexibility in timing, these products are favorites of lawn care companies, who have many customers to service in the spring. Though Dimension cannot be applied as early as Barricade, it is the herbicide of choice if you must apply later than recommended. Dimension is the exception to the rule that pre-emergence herbicides do not kill existing weeds. Dimension can kill crabgrass as long as it is young (two to three leaf stage).

For "Do It Your Selfer's" remember, when using any pesticide, read the label and follow instructions carefully, including personal protective equipment. When hiring a lawn care company make sure the applicator is properly licensed for ornamental and turf care by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

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