

## What's That Funny Looking Grass in my Yard?

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

By late July it isn't uncommon for homeowners to start seeing grasses in their yard that don't look like there fescue or bluegrass. It may get even worse now that there have been some rain showers. These grasses are suddenly growing faster than the normal lawn grasses. They also seem to have a pale green, even a yellowish green color especially if viewed with the sun behind them. As we move on into August, the color difference between these grasses and your fescue or bluegrass will become even more obvious.

These are some of our summer annual weedy grasses, most notably foxtail (there are several species of foxtail) and crabgrass. There may be a few other summer annual grasses, but these are the most common. Being an annual, they started growing from seed this spring, usually germinating in late April or May, although crabgrass can even germinate now and still have time to make seed before frost. Once we have had a fairly hard freeze these grasses will die leaving their seeds behind to carry on their legacy next year.

These grasses require nearly full sun. You won't find them thriving in partial shade and certainly not growing in heavy shade. But under irrigation or wet conditions, these grasses can thrive! If the color of the grass and the lush foliage isn't a dead give away to their identity, take a look at leaf orientation. Fescue and bluegrass tend to have very upright leaves. Foxtail and crabgrass have leaves that tend to be far more horizontal allowing them to intercept more light with less leaf area. Crabgrass will even fall over and root where the joint touches the ground. Fescue and bluegrass headed out in the spring. They wouldn't be heading out now. But these are summer annual grasses. Foxtail has a seed head that looks like a miniature foxtail. Crabgrass has a seed head that comes up with finger like thin spikes coming out in varying directions.

We normally deal with summer annual grasses through crabgrass preventers. But failing to apply the preventer in a timely manner or not getting it activated with irrigation or rainfall in a timely fashion will allow these grasses to get started. Heavy irrigation, high temperatures, or under applying the preventer can all cause the herbicides to break down or lose effectiveness. Anything that disturbs the soil surface can cause breaks in the herbicide protection. Ultimately the best crabgrass preventer is a thick lawn that is mowed tall. Avoid bare soil and you'll avoid most of the summer annual grasses. But none of this helps you right now!

There are basically two commonly available post emerge (after it is up and growing) summer annual grass killers. Quinclorac is good but only on small grasses. If you have grasses that are heading out or have more than about three leaves, Quinclorac is going to be weak. You need to look for a product that contains fenoxaprop-p-ethyl. I am aware of only two products that have this active ingredient; Bayer Advanced (now Bioadvanced but you may find either one out there) Crabgrass Killer for Lawns or Bermudagrass Control for Lawns. The two products are exactly the same and either one will work. They only come in a prepackaged hose end sprayer. Please read the label first but essentially you attach it to your garden hose and spray!

A couple words of warning. This product is only for use on cool season grass lawns like fescue and bluegrass. Do NOT use this on buffalograss. The herbicide is effective and stops growth in the plant very quickly, but the grass plant is slow to die. Let the grass get some post mowing growth before treatment. The more leaf area it has when you spray, the more effective it will be. Then wait a couple of days after treating before mowing. Most importantly, be patient and let it work!