

Is It Time to Apply Crabgrass Preventers?

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Last week's snow likely slammed the brakes on a lot of homeowners spring fever. But warmer days are coming, the moisture will stimulate the grass to start growing and many homeowners are, or will be, thinking about applying crabgrass preventers. Depending on the crabgrass control product you use it may be okay to apply it now, OR, it may be a bit early to do that just yet!

Crabgrass preventers are not weed killers. Weed killers control weeds that are already growing. Crabgrass preventers work by stopping seeds from germinating or killing the seedling just as it starts to germinate. To be effective they have to be applied prior to the weed seeds germinating and then activated by rain or irrigation. Usually a quarter to a half inch of rain is needed to activate the herbicide in these products. A few products then need a couple more weeks before they are fully ready to go.

Crabgrass, and the other summer annual weedy grasses, need warm weather and warm soils to germinate. This normally occurs in late April or early May. So we still have some time to work with. We feel that once the redbuds start blooming in the spring we are likely getting close to the time that the crabgrass will begin germination, so that's a good indication that if you haven't applied crabgrass preventer by then, it's time.

The actual timing of the application depends in part on what pre-emergent herbicide you are using. I like to think of this as we are up to about the third generation of products. The first generation products were chemicals like surflan and balan. They worked very good but only had about an 8 to 10 week effective life. You want to apply these as close to crabgrass germination time as possible. Then you want to re-apply 8 to 10 weeks after the first application to get full season protection.

The second generation products were things like pendimethalin. These products, when used at label rates, will give about 4 months of control. If these aren't applied too early you may get by with just one application. But if you apply too early in April, a repeat application in late July may be in order to protect against late summer breakout of crabgrass, foxtail, etc.

Third generation products include chemicals like dithiopyr (Dimension) and prodiamine (Barricade). These have true season long weedy grass control when used at the proper rate. Some version of these even allow for a late fall application. Both of these products should be applied in March so they have time to be activated by rain or irrigation. Dithiopyr has an added advantage that it can be used on new seedings of fescue and bluegrass two weeks after the seed has germinated. Other products will require a longer wait time before application on newly seeded lawns.

As I sort of hinted just now, these products do not discriminate between desirable grass seedlings and weedy grass seedlings. If you are going to be planting new grass this spring DO NOT apply a crabgrass preventer (one exception) before seeding. These products will effectively prevent your fescue or bluegrass seed from germinating along with the crabgrass seed. The one exception is siduron (Tupersan). Siduron can be applied as a crabgrass preventer even before the newly seeded grasses have emerged. As always, please read and follow all label directions on whatever product you use!