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Horticulture News

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Spring is off and running this year and the questions are rolling in on the optimum timing for applying crabgrass preemergence herbicides. Soon it will be time to consider control of crabgrass in your lawn. Crabgrass is a warm season annual grass that overwinters as seeds and germinates when soil temperatures in mid spring consistently remain at 50 to 55 degrees for a number of days in a row. Seeds can continue to germinate throughout the summer if soil temperatures and moisture conditions are adequate. It grows during the heat of summer, sets seeds and is killed by the first frost. Crabgrass preventers are another name for preemergence herbicides that prevent crabgrass seeds from developing into mature plants. Many people have a somewhat foggy idea of how they work and assume they kill the weed seed. Such is not the case. They do not kill the seed or even keep the seed from germinating but rather kill the young plant after it germinates. Therefore, they do not prevent germination but prevent emergence.

Crabgrass preventers are just that – preventers. With few exceptions they have no effect on existing crabgrass plants, so they must be applied before germination. Additionally, preventers do not last forever once applied to the soil. Microorganisms and natural processes begin to gradually break them down soon after they are applied. Most crabgrass preventers are fairly ineffective after about 60 days, but there is considerable variation among products. (Dimension and Barricade last longer).

For Harvey County, crabgrass typically begins to germinate around May 1 or a little later. April 15 is normally a good target date for applying preventer because it gives active ingredients time to evenly disperse in the soil before crabgrass germination starts. Even better, base timing on the bloom of ornamental plants. The Eastern Redbud tree is a good choice for this purpose. When the trees in your area approach full bloom, apply crabgrass preventer. A follow-up application will be needed about 8 weeks later unless you are using Dimension or Barricade. Products that do require a follow-up application include pendimethalin (Scotts Halts) and Team (Hi-Yield Crabgrass Control).

Dimension and Barricade are the only two products that give season-long control of crabgrass from a single application. In fact, they can be applied much earlier than April 15 and still have sufficient residual strength to last the season. 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 is usually not applied as early as Barricade, it is the herbicide of choice if it must be applied later than recommended. It is the exception to the rule that preemergence herbicides do not kill existing weeds. Dimension can kill crabgrass as long as it is young (two- to three-leafstage). Dimension is also the best choice if treating a lawn that was planted late last

fall. Normally a preemergence herbicide is not recommended unless the lawn has been mowed two to four times. But Dimension is kind to young tall fescue, perennial ryegrass, and Kentucky bluegrass seedlings and some formulations can be applied as early as two weeks after the first sign of germination. However, read the label of the specific product you wish to use to ensure that this use is allowed. Lawns established in the fall can be safely treated with Dimension the following spring even if they have not been mowed.

Note that products containing Dimension and Barricade may use the common name rather than the trade name. The common chemical name for Dimension is dithiopyr and for Barricade is prodiamine. Remember, when using any pesticide, read the label and follow instructions carefully.

We recommend crabgrass preventers be applied before fertilizer so that the grass isn't encouraged to put on too much growth too early. However, it may be difficult to find products that contain preemergents without fertilizer. Those that don't contain fertilizer are listed below.

Pendimethalin - Scotts Halts

Team (Benefin + Trifluralin) - Hi-Yield Crabgrass Control

Dimension - Hi-Yield Turf & Ornamental Weed and Grass Stopper - Bonide Crabgrass & Weed Preventer - Green Light Crabgrass Preventer