



Pre-emergent Crabgrass Control

By Pamm Cooper. UConn Home & Garden Education Center



Warm temperatures in March had many homeowners wondering about when might be a good time to apply a pre-emergent crabgrass control product. Here in Connecticut, the rule of thumb is to apply the selected pre-emergent product between forsythia full bloom and lilac/flowering dogwood bloom. This year the forsythia were early to flower and lilacs and dogwoods are still not showing signs that they are ready to flower. So what should a homeowner do to make sure the pre-emergent product they are going to use will be effective, and will not be applied too late?

The first thing to consider is if the lawn will be or has already been seeded this spring. Certain crabgrass control products will damage new grass seedlings if applied too soon, and others will prevent both crabgrass and lawn grass seed from germinating. Some products like pendimethalin last 4 months and no lawn seeding can be done until after that.

If lawn seeding was done or will need to be done, do it soon. There are two active ingredients contained in certain pre-emergent crabgrass control products that are safe to use at the time of

lawn seeding. Look for the active ingredients siduron or the mesotrione which will be on the product label. Either of these can be used safely for-preemergent crabgrass control when seeding the lawn. Some products may also contain a starter fertilizer. Both of these active ingredients are effective for six weeks and may then be re-applied one more time.

Corn gluten products can be used somewhat effectively for pre-emergent annual weed control. The rate of these products when used their pre-emergent quality will also apply a rate of 2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, which is a rate that is twice the recommended rate for lawns. Pre-emergent effects can be ineffective if rainfall occurs within a week of seed germination, and weeds will get a lot of nitrogen to boot.

Some active ingredients have a long term residual effect, and if applied a little too early, they will still provide good control throughout the summer. Prodiamine dithiopyr and pendimethalin all provide control varying from 3 to 4 months, and some also provide some post-emergent control as well. Check the label on the product to see how long it should last. All need to be watered in somewhat to ensure a good soil barrier is made. After applying, do not rake, dethatch or aerate lawn or the barrier will be broken and crabgrass control may be poor.

A long-term strategy for keeping crabgrass at bay is to maintain a healthy, dense lawn mowed at a height of 2 ½ to 3 ½ inches depending upon grass species. Fescues will do well mowed at the higher end, while Kentucky bluegrass will be fine at 2- 2 1/2 inches. Any grass can benefit from letting it grow a little higher during the heat of summer which will allow more grass blade area for grass to cool itself more effectively. Do not mow the lawn if it will be hot and dry afterward and no supplemental irrigation will be applied.

Even under ideal maintenance efforts, grass can go dormant during hot, dry weather. Dormant lawns in summer are sitting ducks for many weeds that may get a foothold because grass that is not growing cannot withstand severe weed pressure if weed seeds are already in the soil. Scout for any new weeds and pull them out before they develop seed heads. A little grass seed mixed with compost can then be put on the bare soil where the weed was pulled out.

Do not use high rates of nitrogen fertilizer after June as this will stress cool season lawn grasses if the weather gets hot and no irrigation will be applied as needed. Nitrogen applications during the summer will feed many annual weeds and allow good seed head production. Seeding a lawn in late summer -early fall, especially in any bare areas, however small, is always a good idea. Crabgrass seeds can remain viable for years, so anything to give your lawn an edge is helpful.

If you have questions on controlling crabgrass or any other gardening query, call the UConn Home & Garden Education Center (toll-free) at (877) 486-6271, visit www.ladybug.uconn.edu, or get in touch with your local Cooperative Extension Center.