

Time for Lawn Weed Control

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

October, especially the latter half of October, is the time to treat lawns for weeds. The end of the growing season is approaching and weeds that may have bothered us through the summer, like crabgrass and sandburs, will die with the cold weather. But as these weeds are ending their life cycle, another set of weeds are gearing up to frustrate homeowners next spring!

All of these weeds that put colorful little blossoms in our spring yards start growing in the fall. This includes weeds like dandelion (yellow flowers), henbit (purple flowers), speedwell (white flowers) and chickweed (blue flowers). These start growing in the fall as tiny, easily overlooked seedlings. If you have a thick lawn that is mowed tall, you will rarely see these weeds. That's a hint to keep mowing tall and to keep your lawn thick which is best achieved by mowing your lawn tall.

These weeds germinate in late September and early October once the weather and soil have started cooling down and rain showers come along. It's starting to cool down and we've had some showers so they are germinating like gangbusters right now! I try to wait as long as possible in October to treat to get as many seeds germinated as possible. The herbicides that we use to control these weeds are only effective on the weeds that are up and growing. Seeds that sprout after treatment are not going to be controlled. Fall treatment is highly recommended, however, as the weeds are smaller and much more easily killed.

The herbicides that we use to control these weeds can also cause damage to trees, shrubs, ornamentals and garden plants if the spray, or even the vapors from the spray, drift or blow onto the foliage. We've all seen the redbud or grape leaves that are cupped up or down, or the tomato plants that have the upper leaves all twisted and distorted. This is from the vapors that come off what we commonly call, "the dandelion killers". In the fall, the garden plants are dying down, trees and shrubs have leaves that are old and falling off for winter. Temperatures are cooler so fewer vapors come off the sprays that we are using. Damage from accidental drift is rare in the fall!

If we wait to treat until spring, when the weeds have started to bloom, they are much harder to control. Temperatures are often warmer when spring treatments are applied so there is a greater risk of drift. Plants are growing tender new leaves in the spring that are much more subject to herbicide drift injury. All in all, fall treatment is much better.

If you had those pretty little flowers in your lawn this spring, you will likely have them next spring so plant to treat sometime in October. If you applied weed control in early September, you probably need to do it again because weeds will have sprouted since you treated. You can use either liquid herbicides or granular products like weed and feed. Whichever you use make sure you read and follow the label directions for application rates, temperatures, etc.

As we get further into fall, granular products will work more slowly and it will take longer to see control, but they will still work. Liquid products may work faster in cooler weather but still make sure that the air temperature is above 50 degrees and will be for several hours after treatment. Also make sure that the wind is as calm as possible. If you liked the pretty little flowers in your lawn this spring, don't do anything and you'll have them again! If you didn't like them, plan to treat your lawn for weeds in the next couple of weeks.