

## **Crabgrass Preventers Need To Be Applied Now**

### **AGRI-VIEWS**

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Crabgrass has often been called the scourge of the American lawn. In reality crabgrass, in fact most weeds, is rarely a problem in lawns that are kept thick and mowed tall. So if you seem to have a lot of weed and weedy grass issues, consider it a symptom of the problem but not the problem. In the meantime, while you are starting to mow your lawn taller and getting it thicker, now is the time to be applying your crabgrass preventers!

The herbicides that we use on our lawns can be roughly grouped into weed killers and weed preventers. Crabgrass preventers are herbicides that stop crabgrass and many other weed seeds from germinating, or kills them shortly after they start to germinate. This is different from the weed killers (weed and feed products that we used last fall or already this spring) that kill the weeds that are actively growing.

The weeds that are blooming, or getting ready to bloom, in your lawn right now started growing last fall. They are blooming now and even if sprayed with weed killers will go ahead and produce seed before they die. But a lot of those weeds that we fight in our yards in late summer are getting ready to germinate in the next few weeks. Where weed killers have to come in contact with the leaves of actively growing weeds to work, the weed preventers have to create a barrier that will essentially keep the seeds from germinating or getting established.

Most of the homeowner applied crabgrass preventers are granular products that you spread with a fertilizer spreader. Once applied to the lawn, it takes irrigation or rainfall to activate the herbicide. We generally feel that a quarter to a half inch of rain or irrigation needs to be applied to successfully activate the weed preventers. Once you have applied the preventer, don't do anything to disturb the soil surface as any disturbance will cause a gap that can allow weeds to germinate and grow.

Once you apply your crabgrass or weed preventer it starts to lose effectiveness. Some older products were only effective for four to six weeks. Newer products, like Barricade and Dimension, can last for three to five months. Whatever you use, be sure to read the label to see if a re-treatment will be necessary and how soon if it does. So timing of these preventers becomes very critical. If applied too late, the weed seeds have already germinated and gotten started and the preventers won't work. If applied too early, they may get the early weed seeds that germinate, but they may run out of effectiveness a lot sooner requiring multiple re-applications.

Crabgrass, and most of the summer weeds, don't germinate until soils get warmed up into the mid to upper 50s or low 60s. Because of the late arriving spring, soil temperatures have been slow to warm. As of earlier in the week soil temperatures weren't even up to 50 yet. I'm sure the soils got warmer later in the week, but cooler weather forecast for the first part of next week will be bringing them back down. I don't like to depend on the calendar to tell me when to apply my preventer, I look to the plants. We generally feel that with most of the products we use today, you want to be applying crabgrass preventers by the time the redbuds are getting ready to bloom. Redbuds are showing color in their buds, so it's time to start treating!

Two last words of warning on this. If you apply your preventer and it doesn't rain in about a week, irrigate your lawn. Finally, if you still have some reseeding or overseeding to do in your yard this spring, don't use the crabgrass preventers. The preventers work just as well on fescue and bluegrass as they do on crabgrass!