

It's Crabgrass Season!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

One thing that all the rain we've had this month has done is to create very thick lawns. Unfortunately, in many cases, a lot of this grass is not the desired lawn grasses, but crabgrass and foxtail instead. Both of these are annual weedy grasses that most homeowners really don't want in their yards.

Crabgrass and foxtail are two different grasses, in fact there's three species of foxtail that we might have in our yards. But for the purpose of this discussion, we're going to lump all of these together as crabgrass as we can use the same approach to control all of them. Crabgrass is an annual. It died with the frosts of last fall and has to start over from seed this spring. It loves heat and especially heat with lots of rain.

Crabgrass is fairly easy to identify. This time of year you are going to have fairly small plants that are easily pulled up if the soil is moist. Fescue and bluegrass do not have hairs on the plant. Crabgrass will have a fair number of hairs at the base of the leaf, some of them fairly long hairs. Foxtail and crabgrass will have lots of short hairs on the stems. Pull up a plant and hold it up to the light to look for the hairs. Both plants have fairly short leaves that are broad where they attach to the plant. The real cincher for me though is the color. Even well fertilized crabgrass will be much paler than the fescue or bluegrass. If you pay close attention, you can drive down the street and pick the crabgrass out in lawns. If you aren't sure, pull up a plant and bring it to me!

We traditionally have depended on pre-emerge herbicides to keep the crabgrass seeds from germinating. If we had crabgrass get through the pre-emerge herbicide than all we could do was use a burn down herbicide known as MSMA that would burn all the vegetation, but the fescue and bluegrass would survive and keep growing. For MSMA to work effectively though, we needed hot sunny weather and small plants.

In the past few years though we've had two new products come out that gave us more options to control crabgrass after it was up and growing. The active ingredients are quinclorac and fenoxypop-p-ethyl. Quinclorac is the most readily available and can be found in a variety of products, usually in conjunction with traditional broadleaf weed control products. Look for words like "plus crabgrass control" or "controls crabgrass".

Because quinclorac is usually with broadleaf weed killers you need to be careful where you use it to avoid potential damage to flowers, vegetable gardens and other desirable broadleaf vegetation. Quinclorac is also most effective when used on smaller crabgrass plants. Try to get them treated before they have more than 4 full leaves.

I have only found Fenoxypop-p-ethyl in two products both from Bayer Advanced: Bermudagrass Control for Lawns and Crabgrass Killer for Lawns. But be advised that I've also seen their crabgrass killer with quinclorac. The Bermudagrass product does have crabgrass on the label. This product will have better control of larger crabgrass than quinclorac and since it doesn't have the broadleaf weed killer, it can also be used to control grass around many ornamentals.

A couple more added benefits. Fenoxypop-p-ethyl is effective on grass sandburs. Quinclorac is very effective against bindweed! After treatment with either of these products do not collect grass clippings to use for mulch. It's best to not bag the clippings at all and let them return to the lawn. As always, please read and follow all label directions!