

## Time For Lawn Crabgrass Preventers

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

It is time for homeowners to start applying crabgrass preventers to their yards. Before I go any further let me first emphasize that the best crabgrass preventer you can have is a thick healthy lawn that is mowed 3 to 3.5 inches tall. Crabgrass, like many weeds, needs sunlight getting to the soil surface to germinate. If you have a full thick yard, you can probably get by without applying a crabgrass preventer.

Crabgrass preventers are not crabgrass killers. They need to be applied and activated prior to crabgrass seeds germinating. When they are, the crabgrass seed tries to germinate and the preventer kills the process right then and there. If the crabgrass is up and growing then a crabgrass killer is needed, the preventer will simply stop any more crabgrass from growing. Crabgrass preventers, whether applied as a liquid or granule, need to be applied and activated with water before they will work. It takes about one half inch of rain or irrigation to do this. Preferably this is done a couple of weeks before the crabgrass starts to germinate.

Crabgrass is a warm season grass. It needs warm soils before it starts to grow. Generally we say that crabgrass germination starts when one inch soil temperatures are about 60 degrees, but much of the germination won't get started until soil temperatures are 70 degrees or higher. We normally don't expect crabgrass germination to really get started until about May 1 or a little later. So we still have plenty of time to apply crabgrass preventers and have them activated by irrigation or, hopefully, rainfall.

One of the challenges with crabgrass preventers is not applying them too early. The minute you apply a preventer, its effectiveness starts to break down due to normal weather action as well as microbial degradation. It is very important to read the label of the product you are applying to see how soon you need to apply a second treatment to make sure you get control through the season. Most products are going to be good for about 60 days and then a second treatment will be needed. Crabgrass seed can germinate well into August and still have the ability to make viable seed.

There are two newer generation preventers that can give you season long control with one treatment. The products are Dimension and Barricade. Sometimes these products are only listed by chemical name so you may also need to look for dithiopyr or prodiamine. However, be sure to read the label to make sure that the rate you are applying will give season long control. Barricade, at heavier rates can be applied in late fall and still give you good control clear through the following summer.

Dimension is unique among crabgrass preventers in that it even activity on emerged crabgrass being able to kill crabgrass that is not past about the two or three leaf stage. Dimension is also probably the safest product to use on a lawn that was planted last fall even if it hasn't mowed yet. Keep in mind that you do not want to apply a crabgrass preventer this spring if you need to do some seeding or overseeding of your lawn. If you want to thatch or core aerate your yard you also need to do that first before applying your preventer.

As I said at the start of the column, the best crabgrass preventer is a thick lawn mowed tall. But if your lawn, like mine, is less than perfect, you'll want to be applying a crabgrass preventer soon to keep those summertime pesky weeds in control!