

## Late Season Crabgrass Becoming Very Obvious

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

With the abundant rain that we've had the past few weeks, lawns are looking very green. Unfortunately, some of those grasses are a pale green, some are lime green, some are even a yellowish green. These grasses are not showing evidence of nutrient deficiency, in fact they aren't even fescue or bluegrass. These are summer annual grasses, mainly crabgrass and foxtail, which for the rest of this column we'll just call crabgrass as they can be treated the same. These grasses are growing rapidly right now and producing a plethora of seed heads and ultimately seeds which will haunt us next year! Let's take a look at these grasses and how we got to this situation.

Crabgrass is a warm season annual grass. It dies with the first hard freezes of fall and starts over each spring from seed. The seed starts germinating in late April but can germinate well into August and still produce small seed heads with viable seed before frost. It does not grow well in shade preferring full to nearly full sun to reach optimum growth. It is normally going to grow where there is bare soil with sunlight reaching the soil surface. If a lawn is thick and mowed tall so that there is no bare soil, very little crabgrass will get established.

Our usual approach to dealing with crabgrass is to keep the lawn thick and tall, and then use a crabgrass preventer herbicide in the spring. I often contend that if you keep your lawn thick and tall, you won't need the herbicide treatment at all. Unfortunately, based on the vast amount of crabgrass that we're seeing right now, something isn't working!

There are several things that can cause outbreaks of crabgrass. I see many lawns that are mowed entirely too short, often much shorter than the recommended 3 inches for fescue and bluegrass. This causes lawns to become clumpy leaving many areas of bare soil. If no crabgrass preventer was used, Mother Nature will fill these areas with vegetation, often crabgrass. Many times homeowners will tell me that they used a crabgrass preventer and they still had crabgrass. Some of the reasons why we can have a "failure" include normal breakdown of the herbicide over time, application after the crabgrass germinated and gaps in application of the herbicide. Some herbicides need a second application part way through the summer as they are fairly short lived. The first application may have worked, but once it wore off, there was more seed waiting to germinate.

Control options this late in the season are very limited. The only product that will work on large crabgrass is a herbicide, fenoxaprop-p-ethyl, which can be found in Bayer Advanced Bermudagrass Control for Lawns or Crabgrass Killer for Lawns. Both are labeled for controlling crabgrass in fescue and bluegrass lawns. Do not use this product on buffalograss, zoysia or Bermudagrass lawns as you will damage the lawn grasses. The product is effective but slow to show visual evidence of working.

Ultimately the crabgrass has already produced a lot of seed so the cycle is guaranteed to continue next year. If you want to reduce crabgrass risk, work this fall on mowing your lawn taller, and getting the grass stand thicker, as fall is the best time to get new grass established and growing healthy. Plan to apply your crabgrass preventer next year in late March or very early April. Be sure to read the label to make sure you are putting on the right rate or if you will need to make a second application. And of course, if you have any questions or need weeds identified, contact me at the Extension Office!