

New Lawn Weed Control

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

For years I've been telling you to be careful with new grass seedings and pre-emerge crabgrass preventers. The whole reason for this is that crabgrass preventers don't differentiate between grasses we want (fescue and bluegrass) and grasses we don't want (crabgrass). They just stop all those seeds from sprouting. Which is a problem if you are trying to get a lawn started!

What I haven't told you in past years is that there was a product or two labeled for crabgrass control in new lawn seedings. I didn't tell you because the stuff was only so-so in its effectiveness. I honestly tried to steer you towards planting in the fall when crabgrass and other annual grasses were going to be less of a problem. But things have changed now!

I had a homeowner drop me an email a few weeks ago about a "new" product. A product labeled as "starter food for new grass plus weed preventer." I was sure that this was just one of the same old products put in a new package. So I stopped by the store and found it and started reading the label and to my surprise, this was a new product!

The active herbicide ingredient is mesotrione. Mesotrione has been used in crop production for over ten years. Interestingly, mesotrione is a synthetic analog of leptospermone a natural herbicide from certain members of the myrtle plant family of Australia. It's mode of action in sensitive plants is that it prevents carotenoid (a crucial plant pigment) from being made, chlorophyll breaks down and the plant dies. Treated plants will develop a noticeable bleached or whitish look as they start to die.

According to the label on the bag that I looked at, you can expect about six weeks of control of crabgrass and other weeds. That is far different than our traditional "season-long" products containing Barricade, Dimension or pendimethalin. But those products can't be used on a brand new seeding either. As would also be expected, being a newer product, it is more expensive than traditional products. For established lawns, use the traditional crabgrass preventers. But for brand new lawns, this would be a good option. Obviously right now it is our concern to prevent crabgrass competition in a new seeding. But this product could also be used in a fall seeding to reduce competition from certain broadleaf weeds.

Here is where this story gets interesting, at least to me. Mesotrione will work to keep some weeds from getting started (pre-emerge activity), but it also has activity on small weeds that are already growing (post-emerge). Even if your new lawn is seeded and starting to grow, and so are the weeds, you can expect control if the product is applied before the weeds get too big! Mesotrione is also available in a concentrated form (Tenacity) for control of growing weeds in lawns. It's expensive and you might have to buy it over the internet, but the list of weeds it prevents and/or controls is impressive. Post emerge it can even control windmill grass and nimblewill which can be an issue in some lawns! Sorry though, it doesn't control orchardgrass.

Now, a few things to keep in mind. Whatever form of mesotrione you buy and use, read and follow ALL label directions! It is labeled for bluegrass and fescue but not Bermudagrass. The Tenacity version is even listed for use on buffalograss! Because it has pre and post-emerge activity be careful where it is applied. Daylilies and irises are very sensitive to it and can be damaged. Essentially use only on turf and keep it away from flowers, shrubs, trees, fruit or vegetable plants. If you have any questions about this product, please give me a call!