

Why We Apply Weed and Feed in October

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I'm really glad we finally got some rain and cooler temperatures. The abnormally warm September and very dry September has caused many of our lawns to not be in a very growth inclined mood. Fall, in the lawn world that's from about Labor Day to Thanksgiving, is a time when our cool season grasses, tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass, can get a lot of growth and recovery done. It's a time we target seeding, either re-seeding or over-seeding, and also a time for fertilizing and weed control.

In the spring our cool season grasses are trying to produce a flower stalk to produce seed. That's when they do their thing. Fertilizer applied in the spring is going to encourage lots of above ground growth. The more you fertilize the greener your lawn will be and the more you will be mowing!

In the fall, our cool season grasses are working on developing a healthy root system and storing food reserves in the crown of the plant. Fertilizer applied in the fall stimulates the grass plants to grow more roots, develop more tillers, which is how it "thickens" up a lawn, and while it will increase how much the leaves grow, it is very nominal compared to spring fertilizations. In all honesty, with most lawns, if you fertilize twice in the fall you won't need to fertilize in the spring unless it's to apply a crabgrass preventer. But, if you have a thick and full lawn with no bare soil, you aren't really going to have much of a crabgrass problem as crabgrass seed needs bare soil and sunlight to germinate!

If you fertilized in early September, then in a few more weeks you can fertilize again and put on a weed control product. If you applied a weed and feed product in early September, then in a few more weeks you can fertilize again and put on a weed control product because your first weed control product was pretty much a waste of time! If you didn't fertilize at all in September, then you need to fertilize in a few more weeks, AND apply a weed control product.

Most of those flowering weeds that show up in lawns in the spring that homeowners despise, start growing in the fall. Dandelions are a perennial, but chickweed (white flowers), henbit (purple flowers) and speedwell (blue flowers) are all annuals that are just now starting to grow. They start growing once the soil temperature starts to cool down and we get autumn rains. While we can get some germination occurring as early as late August, the majority of these seeds don't germinate until late September and early October. By late October the soil has cooled down enough that germination pretty well stops.

The products that we use to control these weeds at this time of year are only effective if they are applied to weeds that are actively growing. If you applied your weed and feed product in early September, it did a good job of controlling the weeds that were growing at that time. Unfortunately, the ones that have germinated since then are growing unabated. They will go through the winter just fine and start blooming sometime in March. In most years you can apply a weed and feed clear into early November and have good control. You may not see activity soon after applying like you do now, but you will get control.

Whether your fertilized in September or not, make plans now to apply a weed and feed to your lawn in coming weeks. If you don't get it done, don't come crying to me in March when your lawn is full of pretty flowers!