

It's Crabgrass Preventer Season

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

The long cold winter has slowed down everything, including the home owners and their lawn care activities. But spring is here, it's slowly warming up, although not drying out much yet, the sun is shining more regularly and people want to be out in their yards working. After last year's drought, lawns really took a hit so there's a lot of repair work to be done. But what most people are thinking about first thing in the spring is crabgrass and crabgrass preventers!

Crabgrass won't be sprouting for a while yet. But that's okay as we need to have the crabgrass preventers, remember, they are called preventers not killers, activated by a rain or two or some irrigation, and a little bit of time to become fully functional. Unfortunately we can't really depend on the calendar to know when to apply our crabgrass preventers as the weather can change so much from one year to the next.

We are better off to pay attention to some of our plants, especially our native plants, to know when to time our crabgrass applications. We would normally like to get our preventers applied about two weeks ahead of when crabgrass is going to start to germinate. Our best indicator plant is likely the redbud. When redbud trees are nearing full bloom is a good indicator to get the crabgrass preventer applied.

With that said, keep in mind that not all crabgrass preventers are the same. Many of the older products, what I call second generation preventers, products like pendimethalin or Team (benefin + trifluralin) are going to need a second treatment 6 to 8 weeks after the first treatment to get you full season control. If the product you are using contains one of these, read the fine print on the label, then continue reading the label and see how soon you need to reapply. For these products I would definitely wait until redbud bloom to apply.

There are two newer products, what I call third generation preventers, that give longer control. Dimension (dithiopyr) and Barricade (prodiamine), both give longer full season control with one application. Barricade can go on earlier than Dimension, in fact Barricade likely needs to be applied fairly early because it seems to take a little longer to get activated in the soil. Barricade can even be applied in the fall, at a slightly heavier rate than a spring application, and still give you season long control.

Dimension is an interesting product as it has the ability to even control crabgrass that is germinating up to the two to three leaf stage. I wouldn't make it a habit of waiting that long especially since it does have good season long control, but if time gets away from you, plan on using Dimension and any escapes can be controlled with one of the post emerge crabgrass killers. Another interesting characteristic of Dimension is that it is probably the kindest on young seedling turfgrasses. Depending on the product and if it contains other herbicides, Dimension can be used on new seedings of tall fescue or bluegrass as early as two weeks after the first sign of germination. Be sure to read the label of your product before doing this.

It's always important to read the label as to whether the grass should be damp or dry. Check to see how soon you need to water it in to get it activated and even how much irrigation or rain is needed. Be sure to apply it uniformly to avoid gaps in control. Then sweep up any of the fertilizer and preventer that falls on the street, driveway or sidewalk and scatter it around the yard to avoid contaminating storm water runoff. But remember, that whatever product you use, timing is everything!