

Extension Tip of the Week

A common lawn issue this time of year is crabgrass. Crabgrass is a warm season annual weed which germinates in the spring when soil temperatures reach 55 to 60° F. and thrives throughout the summer if not controlled. Like other annual weeds, crabgrass will grow rapidly, flower, set seed and die in a single season. This time of year is when we start to really take notice of crabgrass in our lawns. Seed heads, look like finger-like projections with individual heads having the potential to produce thousands of seeds each in July.

Ideally, crabgrass is controlled with pre-emergence herbicides in the spring, which prevents the seeds from germinating. Herbicides are not effective on emerged weeds. For locations in northern Iowa, a pre-emergent should be applied to lawns in late April to early May. Timing and proper application is everything when we talk about crabgrass control. Even experts would say to watch nature for helpful signs. Herbicides should be applied when forsythia blooms start dropping or when redbud trees reach full bloom. Crabgrass germination begins after these events. Crabgrass has very good survival reproductive capabilities so it is very hard to totally remove crabgrass from home lawns. Applying post-emergence herbicides after mid-July are not as effective since the crabgrass plants are too large to control.

The best way to prevent crabgrass infestations in lawns is to maintain a thick, healthy lawn through proper mowing, irrigation and fertilization. Each time the home lawn is mowed it should be mowed at 2.5- 3.0 inches. Anything shorter than this will encourage crabgrass to grow. Crabgrass will have a difficult time germinating and surviving in a thick turf.