

Crabgrass and its Control

Crabgrass is the most common annual weed grass that invades lawns. It can almost completely take over lawns if left untreated. It is an annual grass, meaning it will only live for one season. Most annual grasses, crabgrass included, grows up from the previous year's seed, produces seed in the summer months, and dies by September. The easiest way to identify crabgrass in your lawn is to look for the light green leaves emerging among the darker green bluegrass turf in mid to late June.



Forsythia shrub in bloom in April

Control is primarily accomplished by using a pre-emergent herbicide or corn gluten at the correct time in mid- to late April, when soil temperatures are around 50 degrees F. If you do not own a soil thermometer, a great way to know when to put down the crabgrass preventer is when the forsythia shrub is in full bloom. These shrubs are often the first shrubs seen blooming in Wisconsin, with yellow flowers emerging before the foliage. At this time, the crabgrass seeds are also just coming out of dormancy, and are therefore most vulnerable to pre-emergent herbicides. It is necessary to water the herbicide into the turf unless rain is forecasted. Since April is not an advisable time to put down fertilizer, it is best that you should use crabgrass pre-emergent herbicide that does not

include fertilizer. Fertilizing the lawn at this time and two to three additional times can culture lawn diseases. In addition, if you put down fertilizer in April, when the lawn is not sprouting, you're just fertilizing weeds and not the turf.

If crabgrass preventer was not applied at the correct time in spring, and you notice the annual weed growing in your lawn, there are some post-emergent liquid sprays that may be used in late June. The most effective products contain the selective herbicide quinclorac. Quinclorac is often one part of lawn herbicide products that also contain three broadleaf herbicides. Other post-emergent crabgrass herbicides contain dithiopyr or fenoxprop p-ethyl.



Crabgrass seedling in June

An effective cultural control is to mow your lawn no shorter than 3 inches in the summer months. This will help the bluegrass turf to better compete with crabgrass. It is also beneficial for the turf grass if you fertilize at least twice: early June and mid-October. In addition, when you see some clumps of crabgrass, you can easily pull out this very shallow rooted grass and therefore keep it from spreading.

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