



Tips on Crabgrass Control

Whenever areas of a lawn become thin, due to salt, drought, disease, insect, or other sources of damage, weeds are likely to move in. One of the likely invaders will be crabgrass. A warm-season annual grass, it persists by producing seeds the previous year that will germinate the next spring after a few consecutive days of temperatures of at least 60 degrees. Usually in Connecticut, this means sometime after forsythia bloom.

Unless new turf grass is established, crabgrass or other weeds will probably come into areas where the lawn grass used to be. The trick is to establish the new grass in a small window of time before the crabgrass seeds dropped last summer germinate and crowd out the desirable grasses. It can be helpful to allow lawn grasses to grow to a height of 3", hopefully shading out the crabgrass seedlings so they won't survive. This will probably not be an effective control strategy if the stand of turf grass is thin.

A pre-emergent herbicide can be used if it was not possible to establish turf grass in the spring, or if the seeded areas did not fill in adequately. This herbicide needs to be applied and watered in according to the product label before crabgrass seed germinates. A barrier will form on the soil surface that will prevent the crabgrass from becoming established. In late summer or early fall, the desired grass can then be seeded. Read the label of the preemergent herbicide used. Some have a residual effect of three to four months. No grass (including desirable turf) will be able to develop from seed if the herbicide remains in place.



Large crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*) out- growing desirable grasses during the heat of summer.

One organic pre-emergent herbicide that can be effective is corn gluten meal. This non- chemical alternative, a byproduct of corn milling, affects root develop of crabgrass and other plants that produce seedlings. Corn gluten meal contains 10% nitrogen, but to be effective it must be applied at a rate that will be the equivalent of two pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. It also requires a period of no irrigation or rain for a week after weeds seeds have germinated. If rain occurs, root develop may then continue and seedlings will have two pounds of nitrogen to use and may outgrow desirable grasses in the right conditions.

A pre-emergent herbicide is available for homeowner use that will allow turf grass seed to develop normally, while preventing crabgrass from coming in. It can be applied at the same time the lawn is seeded. This product is called Tupersan™, which has the active ingredient siduron. After six weeks, siduron products can be applied again to the newly seeded areas to ensure crabgrass will not get a foothold in any thin areas. Do not apply a third time.

Tenacity™ is available for residential use. The active ingredient is mesotrione and is a synthetic form of a compound found in the bottlebrush plant. This product provides both pre-emergent and post-emergent control of both weedy grasses and many broadleaf weeds and can be used when seeding desirable grasses. Read the label to determine the length of effectiveness, as crabgrass can germinate all summer and will come in after herbicides have lost their effectiveness. Apply at the correct rate to avoid damaging existing grass and new seedlings.

Post-emergent herbicides are best used before crabgrass plants are young, when the plant has few. These herbicides are typically sprayed on the plants and do not damage desirable grasses when they are used at the correct rates. Products with the active ingredient Quinclorac provide excellent control of crabgrass at almost any growth stage and are also very safe when applied to new seedlings. Many organic products are better suited to target crabgrass where desirable turf will not be sprayed, and may not be as effective as synthetic herbicides.

As with all weeds, crabgrass will be able to get in only where turf has thinned, gone dormant, or even died due to improper cultural practices, weather, insects or other problems. Herbicides are only a tool, and their use can be limited to only areas where crabgrass has been an issue, as along a roadside where salt may have killed some turf over the winter. It is not always necessary or desirable to treat an entire lawn with any pesticide.



Low cut grass on the right is out-competed by crabgrass. Dense turf cut at a height of three inches to the left has no crabgrass.

If roadside turf is killed because of salt damage in the winter, try seeding these areas with either a fine-leaved fescue or a turf-type tall fescue that is more salt-tolerant than Kentucky Bluegrass and perennial ryegrass which are more susceptible to salt injury. Or consider landscaping along roads with perennials and shrubs that are salt tolerant.

Cool season lawn grasses should not be fertilized during the summer, especially with fast-release nitrogen sources. As grass slows down or even goes dormant in hot weather, crabgrass can gain a foothold because it is an annual grass on a short time table. Fertilizer applied when it is at its maximum growth potential in summer, especially with a fertilizer containing phosphorus, encourages growth and seed head development of this troublesome weed. Mowing may help stop seed head development, but if seed heads are present, bagging clippings can be helpful. Wash both the wheels and the underside of the mower afterwards to prevent seeds from being transported next time around.

Good lawn care practices and proper turf grass species selection go a long way in keeping desirable grasses healthy and better able to withstand many potential problems. A dense, healthy lawn is a better defense against crabgrass invasion than any herbicide.

Contact the UConn Home and Garden Education Center for herbicide or cultural recommendations for crabgrass control. We will also recommend appropriate species of turf grasses based on soil tests and environmental factors.

Despite good cultural practices, pests and diseases at times may appear. Chemical control should be used only after all other methods have failed. For pesticide information please call UConn Home and Garden Education Center weekdays, in Connecticut call toll free 877-486-6271. Out of state call 860-486-6271

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