

CRAB GRASS CONTROL

Crabgrass can be an indicator of other problems with the growing conditions in your lawn. These conditions must be corrected to achieve long-term crabgrass control.

Crabgrass is one of the most prevalent grassy summer annual weeds found in Michigan lawns. Crabgrass thrives in full sun-light and high temperatures and can easily out compete common cool-season grasses. Crab Grass germinates in the spring, growing through the summer and dies with the first hard frost and produces a tremendous amount of seed in the mid- to late summer. These seeds ensure next year's crop of weeds but can also remain dormant in the soil for several years before germinating.

The primary and most effective weed control in a lawn is proper mowing. Regular mowing eliminates some 80 per- cent of weedy species. Other cultural practices, such as judicious fertilization, can further reduce weed competition by increasing turfgrass vigor. Open and weak turfgrass areas promote crabgrass infestations. Thick turf can effectively shade the soil and reduce the number of crab grass seedlings that are able to be established.

Homeowners who complain of crabgrass infestations in April and May are usually identifying tall fescue, nimble will or quack- grass. Crabgrass germination typically begins in early May when soil temperatures reach 62 degrees Fahrenheit at a depth of 1 to 2 inches, or about two weeks after the forsythia blooms begin to drop.

To be effective, preemergence herbicides must be in place before germination occurs. Preemergence treatments are preferred because they are generally more effective for crabgrass control and less injurious to the turfgrass than postemergence treatments. In general, preemergence herbicides should be applied when soil temperatures reach 50 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit, or when forsythia is in full bloom. This will allow the pre- emergence herbicide to form a barrier before the crabgrass seedlings emerge. Preemergence herbicides work by inhibiting the growth of young seedlings. These products do not eliminate established plants and must be applied before germination begins. In Michigan, this is usually around April 15 but can be as late as May 1. Applications made very early in the spring have potential to break down before the end of the germination window and are, for the most part, not recommended. This is a particular problem in the three out of 10 years when late-season conditions are conducive for a second germination flush. Delaying preemergence applications in a very cool or dry spring would provide better season long control because crabgrass germination is also delayed under

these situations. Nearly all commercially available preemergence herbicides are very effective when applied properly.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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