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Controlling Weeds in Home Lawns

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Weeds in your lawn destroy its well-groomed appearance and may detract from the over-all landscape value. They decrease the wearability of the surface and rob nutrients and water from the desirable plants. Some weeds also may be objectionable because of odors, stickers, slime, or stains.

There is no substitute for proper management of the *desirable* grass to discourage weeds and encourage healthy lawn growth. Some weed problems persist in spite of good watering, mowing, and fertilizing practices, and require control measures.

Common Broadleaves

Broadleaf weeds such as dandelions, chickweeds, plantains, mustards, docks, clovers, yarrow, and daisy can be controlled by use of selective herbicides during the spring or early summer. September applications are often successful in western Oregon and in lower elevations of eastern

Oregon. Common broadleaf weed killers available for the home lawn are now usually formulated as mixtures of 2,4-D, dicamba, mecoprop, and sometimes silvex. These formulations can be applied as a spray or as dry granules mixed with fertilizer. The dry formulations should be spread according to manufacturer's directions on turf that has been previously well-watered or after a rain in order to obtain maximum absorption of the material. Spray mixtures are likewise most effective if the weeds are actively growing. Lawn grass injury is more likely at temperatures above 80° F (27° C).

Troublesome Broadleaves

Moss and pearlwort are best controlled by dry applications of ferrous ammonium sulfate. This material, when applied at the rate of 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet (50 g/m²), gives a good fertilizer response by the grass, while turning the moss and pearlwort black. Avoid contact of the chemical with concrete, since permanent yellow staining of the concrete may occur.

Knotweed is most serious in compacted areas adjacent to driveways and sidewalks. Its prostrate stems creep out over the walkways. Young seedlings are most susceptible to 2,4-D as they emerge in early spring. Later growth can be controlled by foliar applications of dicamba.

Morning-glory or bindweed is troublesome only when infecting both ornamental beds and the lawn. There is no satisfactory control since it makes repeated regrowth from deep root stocks. Careful digging of the roots from the beds may eliminate the problem after two or three seasons. With regular mowing and use of chemicals for broadleaf weed control, bindweed will not seriously affect the lawn.

Weedy grasses

Many grasses in the lawn are called "crabgrass." Most are not, so obtain an accurate identification before attempting control.

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Crabgrass is associated with warm summer temperatures, which stimulate its fast germination from previous years' seed crops. It is named for its crab-like arrangement of stolons bearing branched seedheads. Since crabgrass doesn't germinate until temperatures have warmed to at least 55° F (13° C) it can be controlled by spring application of pre-emergent materials before such temperatures develop. Benefin, bensulide, and siduron are available in various formulations. Follow the manufacturer's direction for their use. Crabgrass can be controlled in the vegetative stage by foliar applications of various organic arsenicals. The most commonly available formulations contain methanearsonic acid or its various salts. Two or more applications, spaced at 10 to 14 days, are required. Follow the directions on the container.

Perennial grasses such as velvet grass, tall fescue, or orchard grass form clumps and are very annoying. There is no satisfactory chemical control. Hand-digging and reseeding of the area is probably best. Velvet grass is rather shallow-rooted and can be hand-pulled in the fall with some difficulty.

Bentgrass is commonly used for turf plantings in western Oregon. When growing as isolated patches in other grasses, its fine texture is often objectionable. Bentgrass will gradually take over the lawn. There is no good control short of complete renovation of the area.

Quackgrass has leaves slightly wider than bluegrass or ryegrass. It is commonly found in ornamental beds and spreads into turf areas by underground stems. The best control is removal of the underground stems several times a year for a period of two or more years.

Annual bluegrass is especially serious in areas having mild temperatures. There are some plants in the stand with very short seedheads almost any time temperatures are above freezing. Germination is also occurring throughout the growing season. Annual bluegrass is often associated with traffic patterns, shade, or frequent light watering. Its fast germination and emergence allow it to compete with the slower-developing desirable grasses. Repeated applications of pre-emergent materials such as benefin or bensulide show the most promise for control. They need to be used three or more times per season to prevent new plants from developing. They have no effect on annual bluegrass plants existing as time of spraying. Since some annual bluegrass plants behave as perennials, two or more years of spraying may be required to eliminate the infestation.



Annual bluegrass can be identified by seedheads that form throughout most of the growing season, even on lawns closely mowed. At any one time there may be plants with no seedheads, some just flowering, and others where seed has shattered and fallen.

Identity of other lawn weeds and control recommendations can be made by your Extension agent, master gardener, or perhaps by local landscape suppliers. Chances are others in your area have experienced the same problems and these professionals will know what helps and what doesn't.

When using chemicals on the home lawn, always follow the directions on the container. Take special care in calculating the area to be sprayed and make the necessary dilutions. Most chemicals have very narrow ranges of rates for effective control. Too little will not do the job and too much may injure the desirable grasses. Keep pets and children off the treated areas for several days after treatment of the lawn, and store chemicals out of reach of children.

Cautions

Most herbicides can cause permanent injury to newly established lawn grasses. Avoid using herbicides until the desirable grasses are thoroughly established and have been mowed at least five or six times. Mixtures of herbicides and fertilizers are available. They are convenient and satisfactory when used according to directions. Their continual use, even when you do not have a weed problem, may not be of benefit.