Weeds in the Lawn

University of Idaho Extension
Kootenai County
1250 W Ironwood, Ste 107
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814
Phone: (208) 292-2525
Plant Clinic: (208)292-1377
E-mail: kootenaimg@uidaho.edu
Web: uidaho.edu/kootenai

Most weed problems in lawns are associated with a weak, thin turf. A thin turf is easily pushed aside by aggressive weeds which can become worse over time. Make sure to follow good fertilization, irrigation and mowing guidelines to build a thick, vigorously growing lawn. Heavy weed populations are usually an indication of some other inherent problem with the lawn.

Some perennial weeds, like white clover, can still become problems even in well managed lawns. Many herbicides are available to effectively control weeds in lawns, but their success largely depends on proper application, and perhaps more importantly, on correct timing. Knowing what weeds you have will help you determine the best time of the year to control them.

Realize that it is impossible to eradicate all weeds from a lawn even with herbicide use. Learn to tolerate some weeds in your lawn and avoid indiscriminate use of herbicides which can injure trees, surrounding landscape plants and even the lawn itself.

Perennial Broadleaf Weeds

Some common perennial broadleaf weeds in home lawns include dandelion, field bindweed (also called morning glory), white clover, curly dock, ground ivy, Canada thistle, broadleaf plantain, buckhorn plantain and yarrow. Make sure to properly identify the weeds before choosing herbicides for control. Weeds controlled will be listed on the label. University of Idaho extension educators, master gardeners and nursery personnel can help you with correct identification.

Broadleaf weeds can be controlled with post-emergence herbicides (a chemical that is applied to weeds after the weeds have emerged from the soil) which kill weeds that are actively growing. Post-emergence herbicides do not prevent weed seeds from germinating.

The best time of the year to control perennial weeds is in late summer or early fall when the weeds are preparing for winter. In preparation for winter, perennial weeds move energy reserves from the leaves to underground stems and roots, so an herbicide application at this time will ensure movement of the herbicide to these plant parts. This results in a more effective kill because the roots are being affected. Spring applications to perennial weeds can slow their growth and may kill them, but it is more difficult. Regardless of when applications are made, make sure the weeds are actively growing at time of application. Avoid mowing for 1 to 2 days before and after the application to ensure maximum uptake of the herbicide by the weeds.

There are many broadleaf weed control products available for home use. These products will contain one or a combination of the following chemicals: 2,4-D, 2,4-DP, MCPP, MCPA and dicamba. They are safe to use on cool-season lawn grasses. Liquid and granular formulations of these chemicals are available. It is very important to properly calibrate sprayers or granular spreaders to ensure accurate, uniform

application and avoid spraying adjacent flower beds or susceptible plants. Be sure to read and follow all label directions.

Perennial Grassy Weeds

Perennial grassy weeds are the most difficult weeds to control in a home lawn. Some common perennial grassy weeds include quackgrass, roughstalk bluegrass, smooth bromegrass, annual bluegrass (there are some perennial biotypes) and even other cool-season grasses such as tall fescue and creeping bentgrass. There are essentially no herbicides available for the selective control of these weeds in a lawn. Removal of these problem weedy grasses prior to establishing a lawn and the use of high quality seed or sod is essential to preventing these weeds from becoming a problem. Many home lawns are established with poor quality seed that has high amounts of weeds such as annual bluegrass and roughstalk bluegrass. What is contained in a seed lot you are considering to purchase is readily available on the seed label, but most homeowners are unaware of its importance. If small patches of perennial grasses are found in a lawn, physical removal with a shovel or spraying with a non-selective herbicide such as glyphosate is the only option followed by re-seeding or sodding the bare areas.

Annual Grassy Weeds

Weeds like crabgrass and foxtail are warm-season grasses that germinate from seed in the spring and infest lawns during the hot days of summer. They tend to invade lawns along sidewalks and driveways where temperatures are hottest and lawns are thin. Thick, vigorously growing lawns will out-compete most annual grassy weeds.

Annual grassy weeds are best controlled with pre-emergence herbicides (a chemical that is applied before the seeds have germinated) which kill germinating weeds. These herbicides must be applied well before the weeds germinate since they will not kill weeds once they have emerged. Additionally, some of these pre-emergence herbicides are impregnated on fertilizer granules and applied as a weed and feed. Crabgrass will germinate when soil temperatures reach 55 to 60º F. This occurs around mid-March to early April for the Treasure Valley, Magic Valley and northern Idaho and late March to mid-April for central and eastern Idaho.

There are some herbicides that will kill young annual grassy weeds, but they usually only work well on very young plants so application timing is critical.

Do not over-seed into areas that have recently been treated with pre-emergence herbicides because the chemical will kill emerging lawn grasses as well. Check the label of the herbicide to see how long you need to wait before planting into an area treated with a pre-emergence herbicide.

Source 2013 University of Idaho.
Updated 1/22/2014.

HOW TO CONTROL WEEDS IN THE LAWN

University of Idaho Extension
Kootenai County
1250 W Ironwood, Ste 107
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Phone: (208) 292-2525
Plant Clinic: (208)292-1377
E-mail: kootenaimg@uidaho.edu
Web: uidaho.edu/kootenai

Compiled by Dorothy Kienke
Former Master Gardener Program Coordinator
University of Idaho Extension, Kootenai County

The best defense against weeds invading the lawn is to have a dense healthy stand of turf. Little light reaches the soil surface, and weed seed may not germinate, or weed seedlings will be weak. A healthy turf will out- compete weedy invaders. While soil preparation and site selection are the fundamental to a healthy lawn, sound management practices play a key role. Refer to Extension flyer "Basic Lawn Care" for further information.

Broadleaf weeds – Prevent annual weeds from going to seed. If there are just a few perennial weeds in the lawn try hand-digging or spot treating with a **broadleaf specific** herbicide. Make sure the target plant is listed on the label. Some broadleaf specific herbicides are 2,4D, triclopyr, MCPA, MCPP, and dicamba and are available in home owner size. Specific products such as Ortho Chickweed, Clover and Oxalis Weed Killer or Lily Miller Lawn Weed Killer with Trimec contain a formulation of several herbicides and are used for hard to kill weeds such as Japanese clover, lawn violets and clover etc. Some products, such as dicamba, should not be applied in the root zone of desirable plants. Always read and follow the label.

Non-selective herbicides kill all vegetation contacted. Glyphosate can be found in products such as Round-up, Kleen-up, Knock-Out, Glystar, Honcho, etc. They can be used for spot treating but will not discern between grass and broadleaf plants. Do not use glyphosate products designed for extended control as they contain a soil sterilant. Extended control products are for use along drive ways, fence lines, sidewalk cracks, etc. to prevent regrowth for several months. Dress appropriately when using chemicals and read and follow the label.

Note: Dandelions are very deep rooted, and are very hard to control, usually requiring several herbicide applications during the growing season. Treat before plants go to seed. If hand-digging try to get the entire root as any part left in the soil will regrow.

Bindweed is very deep rooted and hard to control. Roots often go 20 feet deep. Two or three treatments a year applied at mid-bloom to eventually starve out the roots are required. This may take up to two to three years. Hand digging is not an option as even the tiniest part of the little white root system will make a new plant.

Weedy grasses – Common invasive grass species are quackgrass, crabgrass, bentgrass, and annual bluegrass.

Quackgrass – A perennial weedy grass, growing 1-2 feet tall with hollow stems, wheat-like spikes and bluish-green blades that are rough on the upper surface. Spikes produce from seed from May to September. It spreads rapidly by coarse, long pointed, yellow-white stems called rhizomes (some as long as 5 feet). It can tolerate any type of soil. It is very competitive and will crowd out desirable plants. Quackgrass can tolerate any type of soil. Commonly found in lawns, shrubs and flowerbeds.

Control: Quackgrass is difficult to eradicate. Hand digging is not recommended because root pieces left behind will generate new plants. Black plastic is not very effective as rhizomes spread under plastic and the sharp roots can penetrate the plastic. Seeds survive in the soil for up to 4 years.
Kill actively growing quackgrass with the nonselective herbicide glyphosate (found in Roundup, Kleen-up, Knockout Glystar, Honcho). Read and follow the directions carefully. (Use pre-emergent herbicides in flower and shrub beds during early spring, 2 weeks before the last killing frost is expected.

Crabgrass – pale green annual. Blades are short (2-5 inches long), 1/3 inch wide, slightly hairy and tapered to a point. As plant matures, three finger-like seed heads produce thousands of seeds and take on a purplish color. Crabgrass also spreads by rooting at the lower stem joints. It grows rapidly through the summer (June- October) forming broad, dense, flat clumps that smother the turf. Crabgrass will grow in any soil, but prefers light, sandy areas. It sprouts from seed in the early spring after lying dormant all winter. It grows best in hot, dry weather, and is usually killed by a hard frost in the fall.

Control: crabgrass is hard to control once it has sprouted. Try to prevent it from sprouting by applying a crabgrass pre-emergent herbicide in the spring before the seeds germinate (February- April before temperatures are regularly in the 80's). Use an herbicide-only product, or apply an herbicide combined with fertilizer.

Some recommended products are pendimethalin found in Scott's 'Halt' fertilizer and pre-emergent. Also sold as Pendimethalin. Also to be applied in early spring before seeds germinate and before temperatures are regularly in the 80's (February - April).

Bentgrass – Low growing, grayish- green perennial. It spreads by slender, creeping stolons and often forms extensive dense patches. Seed heads would not be seen on frequently mown lawns. Blades are narrow, flat and tapered to sharp point. Bentgrass is primarily on putting greens, is very invasive and will crowd out other grasses. It is shallow rooted and will not survive in dry soils.

Control: Kill out while actively growing in the late summer or early fall. Use the glyphosate found in Round- up, Kleen-up, Knock-out, Glystar, Honcho, etc. Glyphosate may also be applied in spring when grass is actively growing.

Preparation: Skip a mowing to allow grass to form enough green leaf tissue to absorb the chemical. Spray an area at least a foot larger than the bentgrass patch to insure control. Let this area die back for 2 weeks. Remove dead grass. Rake soil and water well. Let weeds and weedy grasses germinate and hoe out or spray again. Then reseed or lay sod.

Annual Bluegrass – a low growing annual. Light apple green with hundreds of whitish-green seed heads at mowing height. Blades are weak and have a boat-shaped tip. Leaves are short, narrow and smooth. Annual bluegrass may persist as a perennial if summers are mild and moist. Annual bluegrass germinates in the fall and is established before cold weather through mild winters and early spring. It likes cool locations, and moist, rich, compacted soils. It grows rapidly in spring, especially if fertilized. It is most serious in compacted soils.

Control: Prevent seeds from germinating by applying a pre-emergent crabgrass control in early to mid-fall. Apply again in mid-March to mid-April. Thatch first. Do not thatch after application. Do not walk on the area for at least 1 week. Aerate compacted soils. Water deeply and infrequently. Another pre-emergent herbicide that may be used is Halts' pre-emergent fertilizer by Scott; apply in spring and fall. Pendulum (pendimethalin), can be ordered from Wilbur Ellis in small packets for homeowners and is another effective pre-emergent herbicide.

Information compiled from WSU/ Spokane County Extension publication, Lawn Care for the Inland Northwest. Updated 1/22/2014.

Trade- name products and services are mentioned as illustrations only. This does not mean that the participating Extension Services endorse these products or services nor do they intend to discriminate against products and services not mentioned.