CONTROLLING WEEDS IN THE LAWN

They’re everywhere! Weeds are invading our lawns and seem to be multiplying by the dozens each time we turn around. Our lawns love this rainy season, but so do the weeds. The wet weather and humidity provide perfect growing conditions for these unwanted plants. Weed management in our lawns can be a difficult task, however, but not impossible. It all starts with maintaining a healthy lawn. The proper identification of the weeds and an understanding of their growth habits also are important for a successful weed-control strategy.

The best control method is to prevent weeds from entering your lawn. This can be done with proper management practices, which encourage dense, flourishing turf. A healthy lawn shades the soil so the sunlight cannot reach weed seeds ready to sprout. It also minimizes the space available for weeds to become established.

Proper fertilizing, watering, mowing and pest-control measures are required to produce healthy turf. If grass is underwatered, overwatered, overfertilized or mowed too low or too infrequently, it is weakened and does not stand a chance against the weeds. Turf damaged by insects or compacted by foot or vehicle traffic is also susceptible to weed invasions.

However, sometimes, no matter how healthy our lawns are, those sneaky weeds will find a way to creep into our lawns. There are two common weed-control methods: manual or chemical control. You may need to use one or both to eliminate the intruders.

Manual control means "by hand". That's pulling the weeds out of the ground, with your hands or with a hoe. This method is great if only a few weeds are present. It's simple to do and it's cheap. If weeds are a major problem in your lawn, then this method may not be for you. Don't worry as there are other alternatives.

The other way uses herbicides to kill plants. Herbicides are safe and effective if the product label instructions are followed properly. Instructions include proper timing of the application and using the herbicide at the proper rate.

Two types of herbicides can control weeds: pre-emergence and post-emergence. Pre-emergence herbicides prevent weed-seed germination. Proper timing is important. The pre-emergence must be applied before the seeds germinate or they will be ineffective. In general they should be applied in late February or early March. Any later and you will have to eliminate the weeds with a post-emergence herbicide.

Post-emergence herbicides are available as selective or non-selective. Selective herbicides control certain plant species without affecting others, such as broadleaf plants (net-like veins and showy flower) versus grass plants (hollow, rounded stems and parallel veins). Non-selective herbicides control all plants, regardless of species. Sometimes a non-selective herbicide is the only thing that can be used to control some varieties of weeds. When using any herbicide, always read the label and follow the directions.

To control weeds in St. Augustine grass:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weed Type</th>
<th>Pre-emergence Herbicide</th>
<th>Post-emergence Herbicide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadleaf (ex: Dollarweed)</td>
<td>Atrazine, Isoxaben</td>
<td>Atrazine, 2,4-D, Dicamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass (ex: Crabgrass)</td>
<td>Atrazine, Benefin</td>
<td>Non-selective spot treatment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To control weeds in Bahia grass:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weed Type</th>
<th>Pre-emergence Herbicide</th>
<th>Post-emergence Herbicide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadleaf (ex: Dollarweed)</td>
<td>Isoxaben</td>
<td>2,4-D, Dicamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass (ex: Crabgrass)</td>
<td>Benefin</td>
<td>Non-selective spot treatment</td>
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</tbody>
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For information about controlling weeds in lawns or for answers to other gardening questions, call (321) 697-3000. Master Gardeners are available to take your calls, Monday to Friday from 10am to 2pm.

Hank Bruce, Horticulture Therapist and author of gardening books, will be the featured speaker at the September meeting of the Osceola County Master Gardeners. The public is invited. Hank will be addressing solutions to world hunger issues. While hunger is a global problem, the solutions are local.

His latest book, Global Gardening, co-authored with his wife, Tomi Folk, describes our global garden of over 15,000 edible plants, and how they can help sustain our world village. Books and plant examples will be available for sale. The program is at 1:45PM, Wednesday, September 11, at the Kissimmee Valley Agriculture Center, 1901 E. Irlo Bronson Hwy, Kissimmee. For further information, please call 404-846-4181.

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