HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

WEED CONTROL

They seem to be worst this year - weeds in the lawn and garden. We could blame the weed problems on the hurricanes, which may have contributed to spreading the weed seeds. Or we could say that it is due to all the wet spring weather we’ve been having. In reality, it is probably a combination of the two. Either way, we know the weeds are causing us headaches and they need to be controlled before they take over our entire landscape.

A weed is defined as any plant that is growing in a place that can include valued landscape plants. If they propagate in an area where you did not intend them to grow, they are weeds. To control weeds, we can use a variety of cultural, mechanical, and chemical methods.

The use of cultural landscape practices to control weeds in a planting bed, among shrubs, and around trees, includes the use of mulch. Mulch provides many benefits to plants, one of which is helping to prevent the growth of weeds. Use 3-4 inches of mulch around plants, shrubs, and trees. Less than 3 inches of mulch will not be as beneficial in preventing weeds.

In the lawn, cultural practices include efficient watering and mowing. Lawns should be watered as needed. Too much water will encourage weeds. Dollarweed, one of the most detested weeds in Florida, is an aquatic plant and will only thrive in wet areas. By decreasing the amount of water applied to the lawn, you can eliminate dollarweed. Mowing the lawn too short will also promote the growth of weeds. St. Augustine and bahia lawns should be mowed 3-4 inches tall. By mowing shorter, the health of the lawn deteriorates and it cannot compete as well with the weeds.

Mechanical control of weeds means pulling them out of the ground manually. This can be a time consuming method, but in some situations it is necessary. Around tender plants, chemicals cannot be used to control the weeds because they could also harm the plants. Therefore, the weeds would have to be pulled out by hand.

When chemical control is needed to control weeds, it is very important to first classify which weeds you have. Weeds can be classified into three categories: broadleaf weeds, grasses, and sedges. Broadleaf weeds are those that have netted veins in their leaves and showy flowers. Grass weeds have parallel veins in their leaves and hollow stems. Sedges have a triangular stem and the leaves emerge in three's. Different chemicals will control different weeds and there are different chemicals for use in the different varieties of turfgrasses. Using the right chemical is especially crucial when controlling weeds in the lawn.

A non-selective herbicide, such as glyphosate, means just that - not selective. It will kill anything green that it touches, including your turf. Unfortunately, this is the only type of herbicide that will kill emerged grass weeds such as crabgrass and goosegrass. Therefore, grass weeds need to be spot-treated so they are killed and not your lawn or other landscape plants. Spot-treating means specifically only spraying the weeds with the chemical.

Broadleaf weeds in the turf are more easily controlled. Herbicides for broadleaf weeds include atrazine and 2,4-D. Atrazine is used to control broadleaf leaves in St. Augustine lawns and 2,4-D is used to control broadleaf weeds in Bahia lawns. Using these products on the proper type of lawns is crucial. Always read the product label and follow the directions precisely. A misapplication could leave you with no weeds AND no lawn.

Herbicides, which include the "weed-and-feed" products, should not be applied when temperatures exceed 85 degrees. If using a granular product, they are required to be watered in after application. Application rates will vary with each product. Just remember that more is not better. Applying more than recommended could be detrimental to your lawn and landscape.

Using the proper cultural practices for weed control in the lawn and landscape will help to reduce weed growth. However, if chemical applications are necessary to control weeds, always follow the directions on the label and apply the product properly.

Questions about weed control and other landscape problems can be answered by the Osceola County Master Gardeners. They are available Monday-Friday from 10am - 2pm. Stop by the Extension Services building in
Osceola Heritage Park or call (321) 697-3000.

Come learn more about caring for your lawn. The University of Florida/Osceola County Extension will present "Building a Tough Turf" on Saturday, April 16th at 10am in the St. Cloud Home Depot garden center. For more information call (321) 697-3000.

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