

## Controlling Weeds in your Florida Lawn

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Weeds are defined as unwanted plants or plants growing in the wrong place. Weed management in our lawns can be a difficult task, however, not impossible. It all starts with maintaining a healthy lawn, the proper identification of weeds, and an understanding of their growth habits. These are all important for a successful weed-control strategy. Weed control should be a carefully planned and coordinated program instead of a trial and error task.

The best control method of weeds is to prevent them from entering your lawn at all. This can be done with proper lawn maintenance practices, which encourage dense, healthy turf. A healthy lawn shades the soil so the sunlight cannot reach weed seeds waiting 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 them.

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. But 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 now - late February to early March. Any later, the weeds have sprouted 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, included grass weeds.

When using herbicides, it is very important to have the right chemical for the right type of turfgrass. St. Augustinegrass and Bahiagrass require different chemicals. Using the wrong chemical on the wrong turfgrass can cause your lawn to turn brown.

For pre-emergence control of broadleaf weeds in St. Augustinegrass use products that contain Atrazine or Isoxaben. For post-emergence control of broadleaf weeds in St. Augustinegrass use Atrazine. Grass weeds can be prevented in St. Augustine grass with the pre-emergence herbicides Agrazine or Benefin. Once germinated, only a non-selective herbicide used as a spot treatment will work to control grass weeds.

For pre-emergence control of broadleaf weeds in Bahiagrass use products containing Isoxaben. Using Atrazine, as listed for St. Augustinegrass, may cause the Bahiagrass to turn brown. For post-emergence control of broadleaf weeds in Bahiagrass use 2,4-D or Dicamba. Grass weeds can be prevented in Bahiagrass with Benefin, a pre-emergence herbicide. Grass weeds that have germinated in Bahiagrass can only be controlled using a non-selective herbicide.

When using any herbicide, always read the label and follow the directions. Some chemicals cannot be used when temperatures reach above 80 degrees, while some products need to be watered-in after application in order to take effect. Also, remember that more is not always better. Applying too much herbicide to your lawn may damage it.

Information of this article was taken from the University of Florida/IFAS publication “Weed Management in Home Lawns.” For a free copy of this publication and for answers to other gardening and landscaping questions, please contact the Osceola County Master Gardeners Monday thru Friday from 9am to 3pm. Call (321) 697-3000. You may also email me at [jwel2@osceola.org](mailto:jwel2@osceola.org).