

Proper Timing for Crabgrass Preventers

Crabgrass preventers are another name for preemergence herbicides that prevent crabgrass seeds from developing into mature plants. Many people have a somewhat foggy idea of how they work and assume they kill the weed seed. Such is not the case. They do not kill the seed or even keep the seed from germinating but rather kill the young plant after it germinates. Therefore, they do not prevent germination but prevent emergence.

Crabgrass preventers are just that – preventers. With few exceptions they have no effect on existing crabgrass plants, so they must be applied before germination. Additionally, preventers do not last forever once applied to the soil. Microorganisms and natural processes begin to gradually break them down soon after they are applied. If some products are applied too early, they may have lost much of their strength by the time they are needed. Most crabgrass preventers are fairly ineffective after about 60 days, but there is considerable variation among products. (Dimension and Barricade last longer. See below.)

For most of Kansas, crabgrass typically begins to germinate around May 1 or a little later. April 15 is normally a good target date for applying preventer because it gives active ingredients time to evenly disperse in the soil before crabgrass germination starts. Even better, base timing on the bloom of ornamental plants. The Eastern Redbud tree is a good choice for this purpose. When the trees in your area approach full bloom, apply crabgrass preventer. A follow-up application will be needed about 8 weeks later unless you are using Dimension or Barricade. Products that do require a follow-up application include pendimethalin (Scotts Halts) and Team (Hi-Yield Crabgrass Control).

Dimension and Barricade are the only two products that give season-long control of crabgrass from a single application. In fact, they can be applied much earlier than April 15 and still have sufficient residual strength to last the season. Barricade can even be applied in the fall for crabgrass control the next season.

Dimension can be applied as early as March 1. Because of the added flexibility in timing, these products are favorites of lawn care companies who have many customers to service in the spring. Though Dimension is usually not applied as early as Barricade, it is the herbicide of choice if it must be applied later than recommended. It is the exception to the rule that preemergence herbicides do not kill existing weeds. Dimension can kill crabgrass as long as it is young (two- to three-leaf stage). Dimension is also the best choice if treating a lawn that was planted late last fall. Normally a preemergence

herbicide is not recommended unless the lawn has been mowed two to four times. But Dimension is kind to young tall fescue, perennial ryegrass, and Kentucky bluegrass seedlings and some formulations can be applied as early as two weeks after the first sign of germination. However, read the label of the specific product you wish to use to ensure that this use is allowed. Lawns established in the fall can be safely treated with Dimension the following spring even if they have not been mowed.

Alicia Boor is an Agriculture and Natural Resources agent in the Cottonwood District (which includes Barton and Ellis counties) for K-State Research and Extension. You can contact her by e-mail at aboor@ksu.edu or calling 620-793-1910.