

Controlling Annual Bluegrass

Last spring, before we were hit by the long, hot summer, I wrote an article on controlling annual bluegrass in lawns. In that article, I talked about post emergent control options because I was getting many calls about this stubborn weed that seems to want to take over more desirable turf species. If you were among those that called with this problem, I'm sure we discussed pre-emergent option that you may want to try. Since annual bluegrass is a cool season annual that will soon be germinating, it's time to start gearing up. For this area of the state, fall pre-emergent products are usually applied in early to mid-September. Some labels allow for a follow up application about 6 to 8 weeks following the first.

Among the pre-emergent herbicides that should do a good job controlling annual bluegrass are Suflan 4AS. The active ingredient in Surflan is oryzalin. Surflan can be used on bermudagrass, centipede, tall fescue, zoysia, and St. Augustine. Benefin is another good option and is the active ingredient in Balan 2.5G, Crabgrass Preventer 2.5G and Crabgrass Preventer 1.72G. The benefin products can be used on the turf species listed above as well as on Ky. Bluegrass.

Another very effective product is Atrazine which you will find under the trade name of Bonus and Southern Lawn Fertilizer plus Weed Control. Atrazine products, however, should only be used on centipede, St Augustine, zoysia and carpetgrass. Applicators should read the label carefully as there are some precautions listed. For example if your centipede lawn was seeded this year, then you should avoid using herbicides until more thoroughly established.

Most preemergence herbicides will provide similar initial efficacy if applied before annual bluegrass germination and if sufficient rain or irrigation is received. Preemergence herbicides require incorporation from irrigation or rainfall so that weeds may absorb the applied material. In order to effectively control annual bluegrass, preemergence herbicides must be concentrated in the upper 1/3 inch of the soil profile. Avoid herbicide retention on leaves and incorporate the herbicide into the soil by irrigating turf immediately after application.

There are some cultural practices that can also help in controlling annual bluegrass. Mowing height significantly influences turfgrass competition with crabgrass, annual bluegrass, and other problem weeds. Height of cut for most lawns should be no less than two inches. Raising the mowing height of tall fescue, for example, to three inches may significantly reduce annual bluegrass establishment in fall and reduce the need for postemergence herbicides in spring.

Finally, annual bluegrass tends to be a growing problem in lawns that have summer annual weeds such as crabgrass. As the crabgrass dies back, weed seed take advantage of the open area left behind. If this is happening in your yard right now then we will need to discuss pre-emergent herbicides for next spring and possibly post emergent herbicides for next summer. In the meantime taking a soil sample now may also expose fertility issues that may be keeping your turf from being a stronger competitor with weeds.