

Crabgrass

Crabgrass, actually large crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*), is the most troublesome grass weed in lawns, and is a major weed in gardens and landscape areas, as well. Crabgrass is a warm-season annual which starts germinating in mid-May in a normal year for our area. It enjoys hot, humid weather (thus the reason it is so bad this year) and needs nearly full-sun. The insidious thing about crabgrass is that its seeds can germinate over a very long time period and thus can become very problematic in hot, dry summers after you've thought weed control needs are done for the year.

The easiest way to control crabgrass is to prevent it from establishing its presence in a given area. If you allow it to produce seeds, they will be with you for a long time, and it can quickly colonize new areas by simply having one healthy plant there the year before. As most of you have probably seen, it seemingly takes over garden and landscape area edges with its long, prostrate stems (often with purple coloring) which have five-lobed seed heads on their ends. As it is an annual, if you did not have this weed in your lawn in previous years, you should not have it the next year, so you should not treat against it.

Fighting crabgrass is a battle in gardens, but you can use such things as mulches, tillage, and hand-pulling very effectively. The key is to get them while they are small, as they can produce seed faster than you may think, and then they've won the battle. In a lawn, this species is more difficult to control, because of its length of germination season.

So, how do you try to keep crabgrass from being a lawn problem?

1. Manage your lawn correctly.
 - = Mow tall, 2.5 - 3 inches, and mow often enough to never cut more than 1/3 of the leaf height.
 - = Water correctly, when needed. Water thoroughly once a week, giving the lawn about one inch of water.
 - = Fertilize correctly. On a low to medium-maintenance lawn, only fertilize once each year, putting on 1 lb of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn around September 1. If you do a second fertilizer application, put it on about June 20, and a third around August 1, if you have a high-maintenance lawn.
 - = Have the right turf species present and keep it as healthy as possible.
 - = Plant more trees, crabgrass doesn't grow in the shade.
2. Use a pre-emergent herbicide **if you had crabgrass last year**.
 - = Apply when the forsythia (branchy, yellow-blossomed shrubs) are in full bloom, usually around May 20 to maximize its effectiveness.
 - = Spraying a liquid formulation is actually most effective, because if you use a fertilizer/crabgrass preventer, you are putting the fertilizer on too early.
 - = Chemicals to use include pendimethalin, benefin, and prodiamine.
 - = A non-chemical possibility is the use of corn gluten meal. However, this doesn't work well until the third or fourth year of application and you have to use sod to fix any spots, as grass seed will not germinate either.
3. Control small patches of crabgrass in your lawn so that it does not set seed for the next year. Hand control is probably the best method for small areas, as post-emergent herbicides are expensive and do not work very well.

