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## Proper Timing for Crabgrass Preventers

Crabgrass is the most common annual grass invader in turf in Southeast Nebraska. Crabgrass preventers are another name for pre-emergence herbicides that prevent crabgrass seeds from developing into mature plants. Many people don't clearly understand how they work. They don't actually keep the seed from germinating; rather, the germinating plant takes up some of the herbicide and is killed as a tiny seedling. Crabgrass preventers are just that, preventers. With few exceptions, they will have no effect on existing crabgrass plants. Therefore, preventers have to be applied before crabgrass germinates. Additionally, they don't last forever once applied to the soil. Microorganisms and natural processes in the soil begin to gradually break them down soon after they are applied. Treatments applied too early may have lost much of their strength by the time they are needed.

Most crabgrass preventers are fairly ineffective after about 60 days, although there is considerable variation among products. Dimension and Barricade last longer. Crabgrass and other annual grasses like foxtail, barnyardgrass, and goosegrass begin germination when soil temperatures reach 60 degrees. For Southeast Nebraska, crabgrass typically begins to germinate around May 1, or a little later. Therefore, after April 15 and before May 7 would be a good target date for applying the preventer; this gives the active ingredients some time to evenly disperse in the soil before crabgrass germination starts. Additionally, weather varies from one spring to the next, and with it the timing of crabgrass germination. For this reason, it is often better to base timing on the bloom of ornamental plants. The Eastern redbud tree is a good one to use: when the trees in your area are approaching full-bloom, apply your crabgrass preventer.

If you have a severe crabgrass problem and/or have problems with prostrate spurge in late summer then a follow-up application will be needed about eight weeks later, unless you are using Dimension or Barricade. Dimension and Barricade are the only two products that will give season-long control of crabgrass from a single application. In fact, they can be applied much earlier than April 15 and still will 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 cannot be applied as early as Barricade, it is the herbicide of choice if you must apply later than recommended. Dimension is the exception to the rule that pre-emergence herbicides do not kill existing weeds. Dimension can kill crabgrass as long as it is young (two to three leaf stage). Note that products that contain Dimension and Barricade may use the common name rather than the trade name. The common chemical name for Dimension is dithiopyr, and for Barricade is prodiamine.

Remember, when using any pesticide, read the label and follow instructions carefully, including personal protective equipment. When hiring a lawn care company make sure they are properly licensed for Ornamental and Turf care by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

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