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## Controlling Crabgrass in Lawns



Five crabgrass species are prevalent in Florida, **India crabgrass, blanket crabgrass, southern crabgrass, tropical crabgrass, and smooth crabgrass.** Most are summer annuals, but blanket and India crabgrass tend to live longer than one growing season, which is why postemergence control is often the only option.

If crabgrass has taken over your lawn, early February is the time to put out a preemergent herbicide. There are several preemergent herbicides (benefin, benefin+orizalin, benefin+trifluralin, bensulide, DCPA, dimethenamid-P, dithiopyr, indaziflam, metolachlor, napropamide, oryzalin, oxadiazon, pendimethalin,

prodiamine) that provide excellent control of crabgrass and are safe at the recommended rate on mature, actively growing grass (Bahia, Bermuda, St. Augustine and Zoysia). Apply herbicides when daytime temperatures reach 65 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit for 4-5 days in a row, or usually about the same time that azalea plants start blooming in the spring. Plan to reapply herbicide for season-long control (check the label).

If weeds are a recurring problem in your lawn, follow these steps to have a healthy, thick lawn that will out-compete most weeds:

**Start off with the right grass.** Bahia is best suited for sandy, acidic soils that are subject to drought. St. Augustine is better suited for mildly acidic to alkaline soils subjected to salty conditions. Also choose grasses based on the amount of care that you are willing to provide. Bahia has a low maintenance level, St. Augustine a moderate level, while Zoysia and Bermuda have a high maintenance level. For areas of dense shade choose a shade-tolerant ground cover or use mulch.

**Mow at the right height.** Standard St. Augustine mow at 3.5 to 4 inches, dwarf St. Augustine (Captiva, Delmar, Sapphire, Seville) 2 to 2.5 inches; Bahia grass 3 to 4 inches; Bermuda ½ to 1 ½ inches; Zoysia 1 to 2 inches. Proper mowing height and frequency will get rid of many annual weeds. Remove clippings when seedheads of grassy weeds are present.

**Mow often.** Remove only 1/3 of the leaf blade each time the lawn is mowed. The shorter it is mowed, the more often it needs to be mowed. Repeatedly removing too much of the grass blade (more than 1/3), or mowing below the proper height will eventually kill the grass. Keep the mower blades sharp for the best cut. Mow when grass is dry.

**Water only when it needs it.** When 30% of the lawn starts to show symptoms of wilt in the morning (i.e. folded leaf blades, bluish-gray color, foot-prints that last for more than 10-15 minutes, and soil is dry), water the grass (unless rain is expected in the next day). Apply ½ to ¾ inch of water each time the lawn is watered.

Overly wet lawns promote sedges, spurges and dollar weed, as well as root rots. When watered and mowed correctly the grass will develop a deep root system and will not require water as often. Water in the early morning when dew is still present. Watering late in the evening promotes disease development.

**Fertilize correctly.** Over-fertilized lawns are much more prone to getting chinch bugs, brown patch, grey leaf spot, pythium blight, powdery mildew and thatch. Under-fertilized lawns are prone to getting dollar spot and rust. Of course, if these insects and diseases attack the lawn large areas may die off leaving a perfect place for weeds to sprout.

Fertilize St. Augustine two weeks after the start of spring regrowth using a complete fertilizer (16-4-8) containing slow-release nitrogen (e.g., Isobutylidene diurea [IBDU], Sulfur-coated urea [SCU], urea formaldehyde, cottonseed meal, or poly-coated sources). Apply 1 pound of nitrogen to 1000 square feet of lawn (divide 100 by the first number on the fertilizer bag to get the pounds of fertilizer to apply per 1000 sq. ft.) e.g. 6.25 pounds of 16-4-8 fertilizer per 1000 square feet. Apply ferrous sulfate or a chelated iron source in July. For Bahia grass apply a complete fertilizer with slow-release nitrogen in March and (August not allowed in Pinellas County) and an iron source in May. Apply a second pound of nitrogen just before June 1.

**Scout.** Watch turf closely for symptoms of disease or insect attack. Keep track of any problems on a calendar and note the location where symptoms first appeared. Knowing when to expect a certain disease or insect pest (i.e., chinch bugs, brown patch, etc.) will help to catch problems early before much damage can be done. Pest problems should be greatly lessened or non-existent when proper maintenance steps are used. Using these steps will lessen the need for pesticides, fungicides and herbicides and help to keep our environment clean.

NOTE: Pinellas County Fertilizer Ordinance prohibits nitrogen and phosphorus application from June 1 through Sept. 30. During the rest of the year, phosphorus can be applied if a soil or tissue test indicates a deficiency.

For more information Google: “Crabgrass Biology and Management in Turf” ifas.

For more information call the UF/IFAS Extension Pinellas County Lawn and Garden Help Line at 727-582-2110 Monday, Tuesday or Thursday. Visit our website at: [pinellascountyextension.org](http://pinellascountyextension.org); or visit the University of Florida Turfgrass website at [turf.ifas.ufl.edu](http://turf.ifas.ufl.edu).

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