

UCSU 20/6.22/3.101  
c.2

COLORADO STATE PUBLICATIONS LIBRARY local  
UCSU20/6.22/3.101 c.2  
Heikes, Eugene/Control of weedy grasses



3 1799 00013 4395

**Colorado State**  
University  
Cooperative  
Extension

# service in ACTION

no. 3.101

## Control of weedy grasses in home lawns

Eugene Heikes and George Beck<sup>1</sup>

### Quick Facts

- It is wise to eliminate as many weeds as possible before seeding a lawn or other permanent planting.
- The first and most important thing in any effective weed control program is identification of the weed or undesirable plant.
- Weeds may be introduced by grass seeds, topsoil additions, animal manures or may be present in the soil already.
- The best way to control weeds in turf is to maintain a dense stand of desirable perennial grass.
- Eliminating weedy grasses in established lawns is difficult but may be accomplished by pulling or digging, or in some cases by chemical control.
- A lawn severely infested with perennial grass weeds should be renovated.

Weedy grasses often are a problem and are difficult to eradicate in lawns and flowerbeds. It is wise to eliminate as many weeds as possible before seeding a lawn or making other permanent plantings. This can be done by frequent watering to germinate the weed seeds in the soil and by shallow cultivation to destroy them. Chemicals also may be used.

### Special Problems

Many grass species can be considered weeds; in fact, any grass other than that which is planted can disfigure a lawn and give it an unsightly appearance. The rank growth and difference in color and texture may give an otherwise neat appearing lawn an unkept look.

The first and most important thing in any effective weed control program is identification of the weed or undesirable plant. Herbicides are specific to specific weeds and will not work the same on all weeds.

If there is a question regarding the identification of a weed or plant, a specimen may be taken to the local Cooperative Extension agent. With the specimen, some of the roots and seed heads or flowering parts should be included if possible.

### Where Do Weeds Come From?

Many weeds are planted when cheaper lawn grass mixtures are used. Seed or plant parts may be present in the soil prior to seeding new lawns, especially in soils used previously for agricultural purposes.

Animal manures or other top dressings can introduce weed seeds, or they may be brought in with topsoil.

### How Do Weeds Get Started?

Frequent shallow watering favors weeds. Keeping the surface soil moist provides excellent germinating conditions for annual grasses, such as crabgrass.

Close mowing decreases the vigor of bluegrass, allowing weeds to become established. A dense mat of lawn grass will shade out many germinating seeds and give weeds greater competition.

### Control of Grass Weeds

The best way to control weeds in turf is to maintain a dense stand of desirable perennial grass. This can be accomplished by using good practices of seeding, mowing, watering and use of herbicides.

<sup>1</sup>Eugene Heikes, former Colorado State University Cooperative Extension faculty; and George Beck, Cooperative Extension weed science specialist and assistant professor; plant pathology and weed sciences (9/88)

## New and Established Lawns

Annual weeds, including weedy grasses, often are abundant in new seedings. However, these usually will disappear after the turfgrass becomes established and is mowed several times. Perennial grass weeds should be cleaned up before grass is seeded. Care should be taken that no seed of coarse-leaved perennial grasses are in the seed used for new lawns.

Soil fumigants can be used to destroy weed seeds and plant parts. However, fumigants are more effective on shallow-rooted weeds, or weeds that germinate near the surface, than deep-rooted perennial grasses, such as quack-grass or field bindweed.

These are difficult to kill with soil fumigants. Soil fumigation materials are expensive and for this reason may be limited to small areas, such as flowerbeds or for spot treatment. Also, some are dangerous and should not be used by homeowners.

Adequate time should be allowed before seeding fumigated areas.

Eliminating weedy grasses in established lawns or flowerbeds may be difficult. Hand pulling or digging may be the most practical method. Chemical control is not always possible because chemicals with the desired selectivity may not be available.

Dowpon (dalapon) and Roundup (glyphosate) are effective grass killers, although they are not selective. They kill desirable lawn grasses as well as undesirable grasses. They can be used to spot-spray individual grassy patches or bunches. An atomizer or paintbrush sometimes is used. They are sometimes available in pressurized cans.

Roundup can be used prior to planting or sodding new lawns or for renovation of old lawns. Roundup does not persist in soil. Apply to actively growing weeds. Have sufficient growth for good interception of the spray. When used ahead of establishing a new lawn, allow enough time after application to determine if any regrowth occurs. Avoid contact of spray with foliage of desirable grasses, trees or shrubs. Follow label directions.

Ammonium sulfate and ammonium nitrate are common nitrogen fertilizers that can be used to spot-treat unwanted perennial bunch grasses when used at relatively high rates. Both materials

are highly soluble in water and with added moisture they soon leach into the soil, leaving no residue. A few weeks after use, spots can be reseeded; or, if spots are small, surrounding bluegrass will fill in spots without reseeding.

Balan (benefin), Betasan (bensulide), Dacthal (DCPA) and Tupersan (siduron) are chemicals that can be used for preemergence crabgrass control. These herbicides must be applied before seeds germinate. In most parts of Colorado, they should be applied between April 1 and May 1. They have little effect on emerged weeds.

These compounds also will control several other annual grassy weeds, such as foxtail, stinkgrass, barnyardgrass and goosegrass. Several of these herbicides will control annual bluegrass with repeated applications.

These chemicals are available as separate compounds and can be applied in a water spray or in granule form; but for homeowner use, they often are combined with commercial fertilizers for convenient application with a lawn fertilizer spreader.

Tupersan also may be applied on newly seeded plantings of bluegrass and several other grass species (user should check the label). It should be applied as the final operation following seeding. Follow label directions for rates of application.

## Creeping Bentgrass

There is no herbicide that will selectively kill bentgrass and not kill bluegrass. Spots or small areas of bentgrass can be killed with Roundup or one of the other grass herbicides. Small areas of bentgrass also can be removed by digging. Bentgrass is relatively shallow rooted. The area can later be reseeded or resodded.

## Control of Perennial Grass Weeds

A lawn severely infested with perennial grass weeds should be renovated. This can be done by spraying the entire lawn with Roundup or by using a soil fumigant. About three to four weeks later, the area can be worked up (plowed, disked or rototilled) and reseeded or resodded with a desirable turfgrass. The soil fumigants have the advantage of also killing weed seeds and insects in the soil.

**Table 1: Suggested herbicides and rates of application for control of grass weeds.**

Weed	Chemical	Rate of Application*	Remarks
Crabgrass (before emergence)	Balan (benefin)	1.75 lbs of 2.5% granules per 1000 sq ft	Apply Balan granules to established turf before undesirable grass seeds germinate. For even application, apply half the required amount of granules in one direction and the other half at right angles.
	Dacthal (DCPA)	5 oz. of 75% WP per 1000 sq ft	Apply Dacthal in early spring—April 1 to May 1 in southern Colorado to May 15 in central and northern counties on established lawns. This material has little effect on emerged weeds. Two applications will be needed to control annual bluegrass; the second application should be made near July 1. Dacthal also will help control mat spurge.
	Tupersan (siduron)	6 to 9 oz a.i. per 1000 sq ft	On established turf, apply Tupersan in the spring just before expected emergence of crabgrass—April 1 to May 1. It controls several annual grass weeds but does not control annual bluegrass, clovers or most broadleaf weeds. At least ½" (1.27 cm) of water should be provided by sprinkler irrigation or rainfall within three days after application to carry the chemical down. It can be used on newly seeded areas without injury to bentgrass, bluegrass or fescues.
	Betasan	liquid and granular form	Betasan should be applied in the spring before grass or other weeds emerge. It will control crabgrass, annual bluegrass and several other annual weeds (see label). Apply only on well established lawns. It also can be used around some ornamentals and ground covers.
Quackgrass Bermudagrass Nimblewill Other perennial bunch grasses	dalapon (Dowpon M)	1 lb in 10 gal; or 1½ oz per gal water	This herbicide is nonselective and will kill desirable lawn grasses as well as undesirable grasses. It may be applied with an atomizer or dabbed on with a rag or paintbrush or sprayed on large areas. Treated spots should not be reseeded for 60 days. Follow label directions for application rates.
	glyphosate (Roundup)	2 tbsp per gal water	Roundup is a systemic, non-selective herbicide; it will kill lawn grasses as well as weedy grasses. It has almost no soil activity and does not persist in the soil, therefore can be used prior to establishing new lawns or for renovation of old lawns. There should be good growth on the grass to intercept and absorb the chemical. Roundup treated spots can be reseeded or resodded 14 days after application. Avoid contact or spray with foliage of trees or shrubs or desirable grasses. Follow label directions for rates, weed species and densities.
	Vapam	1½ qt in 5 gal water per 100 sq ft	Vapam is a nonselective soil fumigant and will kill lawn grasses as well as undesirable grasses. Do not use in the root zone or drip line of desirable trees or large shrubs. Apply on moist soil with a sprayer or sprinkling can. Wait three weeks before reseeding treated areas.

\*Rate of application—active ingredients (a.i.) per acre, or amount of formulated product per prescribed area.

\*Metric equivalents—1 acre = 4,047 sq m  
1 sq ft = .09 sq m  
1 lb = 545 g

1 oz = 28 g  
1 gal = 3.79 l  
1 qt = .95 l

1 tsp = 5 ml  
1 tbsp = 15 ml  
1 cup = 237 ml