

Broadleaf Weed Control in Lawns

A dense, healthy stand of grass is the best way to reduce broadleaf weeds in home lawns. To achieve a healthy lawn, plant the best-adapted turfgrass species and use accepted turf management practices. Even with proper management, however, the best-cared-for lawns can still be invaded by troublesome broadleaf weeds. These may require the careful and selective use of broadleaf weed control herbicides.

A totally weed-free lawn is rarely attainable, even with herbicides. It is better to maintain a healthy lawn and tolerate a few weeds rather than to make many applications of herbicides in an attempt to eliminate all weeds. Indiscriminate use of herbicides can cause problems for trees and other landscape plants, is expensive in time and money, and may actually reduce the vigor of the lawn.

Postemergent herbicides can control existing broadleaf weeds such as dandelion, clover, thistle and bindweed. Postemergent herbicides do not prevent weed seeds from germinating and reinfesting a lawn. Before using a postemergent herbicide for broadleaf weed control, identify the weed(s) you want to control. Not all weed species are easily controlled by the same herbicides. You may need to use a combination of two or more herbicides to control specific weeds. If you cannot identify the weed(s) in question, seek help from your University Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners, garden centers, or others knowledgeable about turfgrass weeds.

Applications of herbicides intended for postemergent broadleaf weed control kill only those weeds already present when the herbicide is applied. They do not prevent weed seeds from germinating and developing in the lawn at a later date.

For effective control, weeds must be actively growing when the herbicides are applied. Make spring applications from mid-April through early June, and fall applications in September and October. Applications during July and August are strongly discouraged because weed control is often poor and there is an increased risk of causing damage or discoloration to the lawn, as well as to trees, shrubs, flowers and vegetables.

Liquid and granular formulations of herbicides can be equally effective if they are used properly. Do not apply either if rain is expected within 24 hours of application. For best results, do not mow the turf or water for at least 24 hours following application of either granular or liquid products.

Granular herbicides are the most effective if applied to grass that is moist from morning dew, rainfall or irrigation because the granules adhere to the wet surfaces. Application of granular products to dry turf generally controls few weeds. Be careful when applying herbicides near trees, shrubs, flower beds and vegetable gardens. Drift from spray applications or misdirected application of granular products can damage or kill these plants. Tree roots can absorb large amounts of herbicides, so be careful applying any herbicide within a tree's root zone, which extends far beyond the tree's "drip line."

In a mature, older landscape, roots of trees and shrubs often occur throughout the entire lawn area. Do not make more than two herbicide applications per growing season on lawns with trees growing in them. Two applications are probably unnecessary for most lawns.

Please contact the Farm Advisor's office at <http://cecalaveras.ucdavis.edu> or 754-6477 with your agricultural questions.