

WEEKLY NEWS COLUMN

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THE BEST DEFENSE AGAINST WEEDS IN THE HOME LAWN

What is a homeowner's No. 1 lawn concern? If you guessed, "weeds", you're right. How do most homeowners attempt to control weeds? If you guessed, "chemical", or "spraying", you're correct. But, homeowners should take note that while herbicides are an important tool for controlling weeds, they aren't the *only* tool. Chemical weed control is only one part of effective weed control practices. The best defense against weeds in turf grass is a dense, healthy, lawn, which is created through a combination of chemical and cultural practices.

Weeds are opportunists. They take advantage of open spaces in the lawn in thin, weak stands of turf. The following practices make your yard susceptible to weed problems: improper mowing, improper watering, improper fertilizing, insect and disease injury, compacted soil, excessive wear, wrong kind of grass, environmental stress and thatch.

It's important to develop a good lawn weed control program. Know what kind of grass you have and how many square feet of lawn area you have. Identify the problem weed or weeds and determine why they invaded the lawn. Then, correct the conditions or cultural practices that caused the problem.

There several classes of lawn weeds and they require different methods of control during the growing season. There is no single product that will control all weeds for the entire growing season. Turf weeds are divided into five classes to determine appropriate control: annual grasses, annual broadleaf weeds, perennial grasses, perennial broadleaf weeds and miscellaneous weeds. If you are unsure what type of weeds you have, they can be identified by emailing a picture or bringing a sample to the Cowley County Extension Office.

A combination of turf grass competition, mechanical control and chemical control is the best defense against weeds. To grow turf that will compete with weeds, select a species for your area and use recommended varieties. Maintain a soil pH between 6 and 7. Mow, water and fertilize properly; control insect and disease damage; control thatch; and aerate compacted soil. Mechanical control includes tillage before seeding the lawn, proper mowing and hand weeding. Mow regularly at the proper height. Chemical control (herbicides) may be the only effective method of control for some weeds. They are especially helpful during new lawn establishment or renovation of an old lawn. Use herbicides only as necessary and only as directed on the label. Improper use can result in poor weed control and damage to the turf. Once the turf is dense and well established, chemical control should decrease and be used as an aid to good cultural practices.

For more information about home lawns, gardens and weed control, contact the K-State Research and Extension Office 221-5450, 441-4565; or email klndyke@ksu.edu.

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