North Carolina Cooperative Extension

March 2013

GardenWise

Controlling Crabgrass *by Craig Mauney, Horticulture Agent*

Crabgrass is one of the most common weed problems in lawns. If you use an herbicide for control, proper timing is critical. Avoiding the need for herbicides can be done through using the correct cultural practices in maintaining your lawn.

Crabgrass grows low to the ground, spreading outward. In areas of the lawn not being mowed, crabgrass can get taller. It is an annual which means it grows each year from seeds germinating in the late spring then completes its life cycle by the end of the summer season. Crabgrass produces more seed then dies. Allowing crabgrass to go to seed can bring in 150,000 seeds from one plant every year. Only half of these may germinate the next year so the rest may stay in the soil and germinate years later. A good way to control crabgrass is prevent either the seed from forming or the seed germinating.

Seeds from crabgrass begin germinating in the spring when the soil temperatures reach from 55 to 60 degrees (F) for 3 to 10 days in a row. Bare ground warms sooner in spring than one covered in a dense turf grass. The turf grass shields the soil from the hot sun.

Pre-emergent herbicides are commonly used in controlling crabgrass seed from germinating. We often find the pre-emergent combined with lawn fertilizers, so both can be applied at the same time. Make sure and follow the directions label of any pre-emergent or pesticide used on the lawn. Timing is crucial on the germinating seeds so we must apply the pre-emergent before any of the seeds begin germination. In our area, crabgrass seed can germinate for as much as three months until the soil reaches a high temperature or when our cool season grasses go semi-dormant. If applied too late, the pre-emergent will not be effective because the seeds will have already germinated and when the cool season grass is dormant the crabgrass takes over the lawn. A common guide for us in the Piedmont is applying the pre-emergent before the dogwoods bloom. This is usually around mid-April so it is best to get the pre-emergent down in March. It is best to be a little early than too late.

If you are seeding bare spots in the lawn in the spring by applying seed, keep in mind that pre-emergent herbicides may kill desirable seeds just as they do crabgrass seed. If you apply early in February then keep in mind you may need another application mid to late June as most pre-emergent herbicides last from 2-3 months.

Culture is another way we prevent a crabgrass population from taking over our lawn. We strive to maintain a dense healthy lawn. Take a soil test if you haven't done so to correct the pH. Apply only the nutrients needed. This way nutrients the grass does not need, such as phosphorus, may end up in the waterways.

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Inside this issue:

Forsyth County Center
1450 Fairchild Rd
Winston-Salem, NC
27105
Office: 336-703-2850
Fax: 336-767-3557

www.forsyth.cc
and
forsyth.ces.ncsu.edu

R. Craig Mauney
Extension Agent
Horticulture

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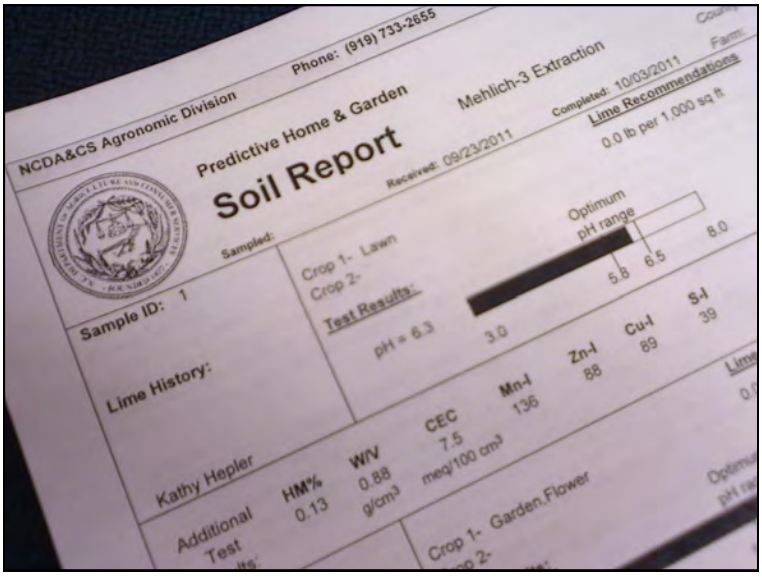
If it doesn't rain, grass can use an inch of water each week during the season. The most important cultural practice is proper mowing to keep crabgrass in control. Mow your cool season grass high around two and a half to three inches of height. Mow often, only removing about one-third of the blade in one mowing. In spite of your best effort you may still get a few crabgrass plants growing so you may just need to pull those few crabgrass plants or if you get a high amount you may have to use an application of herbicide called a post-emergent to control the crabgrass from growing in the current season and producing more seed.

From the Master Gardener Hotline - Improving Garden Soil

By Bert Lantz, Master Gardener Volunteer

We usually get a few calls each year from individuals wanting to know if they should apply lime to their lawns and gardens. Some assume that lime should be applied at least every couple of years, but that is basically a "shot in the dark". To determine if an application of lime is required, it is best to get a soil test. The best time to test soil in your lawn and garden is in the fall or winter months, but soil tests can be completed at any time. Soil sample collection boxes and instructions are available at the Forsyth Country Center at 1450 Fairchild Road, off Liberty Street, near the Smith Reynolds Airport. There is no cost for the test.

When you receive your test results, the pH number will determine if your lawn or garden requires lime. pH is a measure of the active acidity in the soil solution. A neutral pH is 7.0, and lower readings may indicate that lime should be applied. However, lawns and gardens generally do well when the pH is slightly acidic.



The lime recommendation will be shown under the Lime column as a number. For example, if the number is 25M, it means that you need 25 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Assume your lawn area is 12,000 square feet. Divide the area by 1,000 to obtain the number of units in your lawn. In this case the number of units is 12. Multiply this by the pounds recommended and the result is (12 x 25 = 300 pounds), which is the amount of lime you should apply. If lime is recommended, make sure you use agricultural limestone or ground Dolomitic limestone. Hydrated limes should not be used because they could severely burn grass at high rates. Lime is very slow acting so the pH will not change rapidly, but applying lime after aerification will increase the rate of pH change in the soil.

Separate soil tests should be conducted in beds where plants such as blueberries, rhododendrons, gardenias or blue hydrangeas are grown. These plants are acid loving plants and a pH of 5.5 or lower is recommended. The best way to lower the pH is by using Elemental Sulfur (flowers of sulfur). This is usually available in most garden centers and costs about $7.00 for a 4 pound package. Aluminum Sulfate can also be used and while it is more expensive, the results are almost immediate. There is some concern about aluminum toxicity from using Aluminum Sulfate on plants such as blueberries, but it appears to be safe for other species. Many fertilizers for acid loving plants contain sulfate sulfur, and while these fertilizers may help to maintain the soil pH, they will not materially lower the pH. Using pine needles as mulch around the plants may also be helpful in maintaining the desired pH.

As a general rule, it is best to prepare beds before planting. The maximum amount of sulfur that should be mixed into the soil is 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet. If you are dealing with an existing bed, a top dressing of sulfur can also be applied at the rate of 1 cup (approximately ½ pound) of sulfur equally distributed around each plant. Elemental Sulfur reacts slowly, and results may not be evident for a few months. Consequently, it is best to re-test the soil in 6 to 12 months to determine if additional treatments may be required.

Crop Selection for the Community Garden

by Mary Jac Brennan, Extension Agent - Community Gardens

There are several considerations to take into account when planning what to grow in your community garden. It is a good idea to ask the following questions of your community garden members. Is the produce being grown for your personal consumption? Will you be donating the harvest from your garden? Are you growing in raised beds or is your garden planted directly into the ground? How much space do you have in your garden? Will there be a time over the growing season when you are away from the garden for an extended period? Do you have access to water in your garden? Are you using organic practices in your garden? By answering these questions, you can start to focus in on the crops best suited to your community gardening needs. Completing the survey process with your group will help all participants to feel a part of the group, and to better understand garden operations.

When growing for personal consumption, the most important question to consider is what do you like to eat? If your entire summer garden exists for the purpose of supplying your tomato sandwich fix, then by all means grow tomatoes! Whether you are growing in the limited space of a raised bed or have the luxury of a large garden plot, there are numerous types and varieties of tomatoes from which to choose. The tomato is a warm season crop. With special production practices you can produce your first tomatoes in 60 days. This crop can be grown for production from June through November by choosing the right varieties and production practices. Generally, tomatoes require a large investment in time and labor. The spacing depends on the variety, the training system and management system. Rows are 4 to 6 ft apart. Determinate plants are usually spaced 18 to 24 inches apart. If you are limited to a 4 foot by 8 foot raised bed, you may want to consider using cherry tomatoes to maximize your garden space. If you are donating the harvest of your community garden to a food pantry, consider the end user of the produce. Also take into account the post harvest handling of the produce to preserve shelf life, since it may be as many as 7 days from harvest to consumption. Of equal importance is the nutritional value of the produce. Nutritionally dense crops are excellent choices for donation gardens. Consider growing southern field peas, which can be eaten fresh, provide high levels of protein, and can be dried and stored for later use. Other nutritionally dense produce good for growing in community gardens are dark green vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, and kale, or red and yellow vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers or sweet potatoes. Field peas, tomatoes, peppers and sweet potatoes are warm season crops grown in a summer garden. Broccoli, cabbage and kale are cool season crops grown in early spring or fall gardens.

If your volunteer participation drops off when the heat hits in July, plant a single crop that can be easily maintained with smaller numbers of people. Hold big event workdays for planting and harvesting. Organize your garden group to plant Irish potatoes from Feb. 15 until April 1 or sweet potatoes from May 15 until June 15. Both types of potatoes are crops that work well under this system. You can keep the group informed of the garden's progress and invite the large group back for a harvest party!

If you will be away from the garden during a portion of the growing season, try to adapt your planting times so that you will have less work in the garden while you are unavailable. Know the critical watering periods for vegetables and target the timing and amount of water to add. As a rule of thumb, water is most critical during the first few weeks of development, immediately after transplanting, and during flowering and fruit production. All vegetables will require adequate water for good yield.

Visit www.forsythcommunitygardening.com and check the Resource tab for a link to the Home Vegetable Gardening Brochure. This leaflet details the suggested varieties, planting dates and practices, as well as the days to maturity for vegetables that grow well in Forsyth County. Use this information for making a garden production calendar which includes what you will plant as well as determining when it will be ready for harvest. Good community garden planning leads to good community garden harvests.

For more information about community gardening in Forsyth County, visit the website above, our facebook page, or contact Mary Jac Brennan at 703-2869 or by email at brennamj@forsyth.cc .

Roof Gardens Lecture

When: March 20, 2013

Time: 11:00am - 12noon

Cost: FREE

Where: Forsyth Cooperative Extension Service
1450 Fairchild Rd
Winston-Salem, NC

Mary Ann Uhlmann, Environmental Horticulturist and Manager of Vegetated Roof Systems Program Development for Tremco, Inc., will present a lecture on "Roof Gardens". Co-sponsored by the Old Salem Garden Club and the Forsyth County Cooperative Extension Service, this lecture will show the important role vegetated roofing and living architecture can play in mitigating manmade environmental challenges while enhancing the livability and sustainability of our cities and communities.

For accommodations for persons with disabilities, please contact our office at 336-703-2850 no later than five days before the event.

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