

Green Garden News

Winter Weed Control in Centipede and St. Augustine Grass Lawns

Most of the weeds you see in March and April are winter annuals. They sprouted last fall, grew slowly through the winter, and now are peaking. Be patient and many of them will be gone by summer. Just keep them mowed so that they don't produce too many seed. And, if you really want to do something about them, mark your calendar for next fall when they are about to sprout again.

October is the time to apply a preemergence herbicide to prevent the germination of the winter weeds you see out there now. But don't apply it in the form of a nitrogen-containing weed-n-feed (nitrogen is the first number in the fertilizer analysis). Nitrogen at that time can harm your warm-season lawn, which should be going dormant at that time of year.

If you insist on trying to kill those full-grown winter weeds that are out there right now, then you have a couple of possible choices. There are some postemergence herbicides containing a three-way mixture of 2,4-D amine + dicamba + MCPP and/or 2,4-DP. If the label on the herbicide says it can be used on centipede or St. Augustinegrass, you can proceed, but do so with caution. Use the product at the lowest recommended rate. It's better to apply a light rate and then make a repeat application 2-3 weeks later than

to make one heavy application. Don't apply these products once the temperatures start climbing above eighty degrees.

There is also a product called Prompt, that is a combination of atrazine and bentazon. The bentazon adds a postemergence effect. This product will work better on emerged weeds than will atrazine alone. Check with a knowledgeable garden center sales person, and they may have some other postemergence herbicides available now, too. There are a few others, but none of them are likely to kill all the types of weeds you have now. Sorry, but there's just no silver bullet that will take out all those weeds and leave your lawn-grass unscathed.

If you apply any herbicide on your lawn, take the time to read the label thoroughly and follow the directions carefully. Correct rate is very important and can make the difference between safely applying the herbicide and killing your lawn. Be aware that correct rate is not only determined by how much of the concentrate you mix in the spray tank but also by how much area you cover with the mixture. How much area you cover is determined by how fast you walk across the area as you spray.

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The use of trade names is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product names.

March Gardening Tips

Flowers

- Annual flowers that can be planted in March include: ageratum, alyssum, amaranthus, asters, baby's breath, begonia, calendula, celosia, cosmos, dahlia, dusty miller, gaillardia, geranium, hollyhock, impatiens, marigold, nicotiana, ornamental pepper, pentas, phlox, rudbeckia, salvia, sweet Williams, torenia, verbena, vinca and zinnia.
- Caladium bulbs are extremely sensitive to cold soil. There is no advantage to planting early. Purchase caladium bulbs while there is a good selection, but wait until late March or April before planting them in shady beds.

Trees and Shrubs

- Finish pruning summer flowering shrubs such as althea, hibiscus, abelia, oakleaf hydrangea and oleander.
- Delay the pruning of azaleas, camellias, spiraeas, gardenias and other spring flowering shrubs until after flowering is complete.
- Prune any cold weather-damaged plants after new growth appears.
- If needed, fertilize shrubs and small trees with a slow release fertilizer. A good general-purpose landscape fertilizer is a 15-0-15.
- Mature palms should receive a complete granular fertilizer formulated for palms ("palm special") three to four times per beginning in March and ending in September.
- Last opportunity to spray shrubs with a dormant horticultural oil.
- Pick up all fallen camellia blossoms and remove them from your property. This practice helps to prevent petal blight next season.
- Prune ornamental grasses.

Vegetable Garden

- This is the month for establishing a spring vegetable garden. Early March plantings have about an even chance of avoiding a late frost.
- The warm season vegetables that can be planted this month are: bush beans, pole beans, lima beans, cantaloupes, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, southern peas, peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, summer squash, winter squash, tomatoes and watermelon.
- The cool season vegetables that can be planted this month are: beets, carrots, celery, collards, endive, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, bunching onions, parsley, English peas, Irish potatoes, radish and turnips.

Lawns

- Rake dead grass to allow new grass to grow. This will also increase the effectiveness of fertilizers and pesticides applied to the lawn.
- If a preemergence lawn herbicide is needed to control summer weeds, it should be applied in early March. Make certain to choose one that is safe on your kind of grass.
- Keep lawn herbicides away from the root zones of desirable flower, shrubs and other plants.
- Fertilize the lawn only after the danger of frost has passed and when the grass has greened up. Fertilize using a complete fertilizer applied at 0.5 lbs nitrogen per 1000 sqft containing 50% soluble and 50% slow-release nitrogen.
- Service the lawn mower: include a sharpening of the blade and adjusting of the cutting height for your type of grass.
- Anyone considering establishment of centipede-grass from seed should hold off until the soil warms up and stabilizes above 70°F.

New or Revised UF/IFAS Publications

Azaleas for Florida. This revised publication is available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG019>

Golden Silk Spider. This revised publication is available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN467>

Formosan Subterranean Termite. This revised publication is available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN278>

Not online? Contact your local Extension Office for a copy

Herbicide Failures

Early March is the appropriate time to apply a preemergence herbicide to prevent summer weeds. Preemergence herbicides must be applied prior to the germination of the weeds. There are many good preemergence herbicides available to homeowners and when used properly will be very effective in reducing the number of weeds in your lawn. However, it's common for homeowners who apply a pre-emergent herbicide to become very frustrated when their lawns are overrun with weeds. When I ask them about their weed control program, they undoubtedly say that they have used herbicides but they just don't seem to work. Human nature is to blame the chemical. Unfortunately, there are many reasons for weed control failure. Usually, it's not the fault of the chemical.

When dealing with a weed problem, it is very important to take an integrated approach to the problem. Weeds are weeds because they have developed some strong survival mechanisms. Therefore, a single strategy approach to weed control is seldom successful.

In its most basic form, a weed control program consists of four strategies. First and foremost, implement appropriate cultural practices. Proper plant selection, fertilization and mowing are important. However, the most important cultural practice is managing the water. Many of our most problematic weeds, including dollarweed and many of the sedges, love wet areas. Controlling the water goes a long way in controlling the weed.

Our second weed management strategy is weed prevention. This includes starting with clean planting material, monitoring areas where topsoil has been brought in, cleaning off equipment that might spread weed seed and preventing weeds from producing seed.

Our third weed management strategy is weed identification. Certain weeds are indicators of underlying problems. For example, large numbers of spurge or pusley may indicate a high nematode problem.

Understanding weed classification is also important. Weeds are first grouped into two large

categories: grass type weeds (crabgrass, annual bluegrass) or broadleaf weeds (Virginia buttonweed, chamberbitter). The next step in weed classification is based on their growing cycle and groups weeds into annuals, perennials or biennials. Annual weeds, those completing their life cycle in one year, can be further classified into summer annuals and winter annuals.

If you see a lot of weeds during February through April, you probably are growing winter weeds. Early October is the time to apply a preemergence herbicide for winter annual weeds. March is the time to apply a preemergence herbicide for summer weeds.

There are many good preemergence herbicides available, if you look for them. And choosing the correct one is very important. Equally important is applying them correctly.

Preemergence (pre's) herbicides do not prevent weed seeds from germinating. When the pre's are applied they create a "herbicide zone" in the soil. As a weed seed germinates, the seedling comes into contact with the herbicide and dies.

When using pre's three important factors are:

- (1) applying the herbicide before the weed seeds germinate,
- (2) watering the herbicide in with at least 0.25 to 0.5 inches of rainfall or irrigation and
- (3) not allowing gaps in the herbicide barrier.

Some common reasons herbicides fail are:

- Not reading and/or following label specifications
- Improper weed identification
- Improper herbicide selection
- Improper method of application
- Improper timing of application.

If you have a weed problem, consider implementing a year-round, complete weed management program.

—by Theresa Friday, UF/IFAS Santa Rosa County Extension Faculty



Upcoming Events

Every Tuesday in March: *Plant Diagnostic Clinic.* This free clinic is open to the public from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Tuesdays at the South Santa Rosa Service Center at 5819 Gulf Breeze Pkwy. If you are having problems with your lawn or plants, bring a sample in and an Extension Horticulturist or Master Gardener will be available to discuss your gardening questions.

March 10, 2005: *Magnolia Field Day.* Growers, landscapers, Master Gardeners and other plant lovers are invited to attend a Magnolia Field Day on Thursday, March 10, from 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm at the UF/IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center (NFREC) in Quincy. The Field Day will showcase over 120 magnolias, many of which should be in full bloom. Call (850) 875-7100, extension 0, or email VPMorris@ifas.ufl.edu to pre-register or for more information. Registration is free for those who pre-register by March 9. Registration at the door is \$5 beginning at 12:30 p.m., March 10, in the lobby of NFREC's Main Building. The NFREC-Quincy is located at Exit 181 on Interstate 10, about 20 miles west of Tallahassee. After exiting, go about 1/8 mile north on State Road 267. The NFREC address is 155 Research Road, Quincy, FL 32351. Visit our website at <http://nfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/>. For a map, visit <http://nfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/Locations.htm>. Find a complete list of magnolias and other plants on display and more information about the Magnolia Field Day at <http://nfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/LandscapePlant.htm>.

March 10-13, 2005: *Festival of Flowers.* Experience "An English Garden Affair" at Mobile's signature showcase of excellence in landscape and floral design and horticulture. The Festival of Flowers is acknowledged as the premier flower and garden event of the greater Gulf Coast. More information is online at <http://www.festivalofflowers.com>.

March 17, 2005: *Gulf Coast Gardening From the Ground UP: Spring Vegetable Gardening.* This free program is open to the public and will be presented at the Milton Library at 5541 Alabama Street, Milton, FL. Registration will open at 6:00

pm and the class will start at 6:30 pm. Jim Tolar, Santa Rosa County Master Gardener, will discuss how to plant your vegetable garden for maximum success. The program will last approximately 2 hours followed by a question and answer period.

March 19, 2005: *Gulf Coast Gardening From the Ground UP: Spring Vegetable Gardening.* This free program is open to the public and will be presented at the Navarre Library at 8484 James M. Harvell Road, Navarre, FL. Registration will open at 9:00 am and the class will start at 10:00 am. Jim Tolar, Santa Rosa County Master Gardener, will discuss how to plant your vegetable garden for maximum success. The program will last approximately 2 hours followed by a question and answer period.

March 31, 2005: *Wildlife Food Plot Field Day.* This field day is sponsored by the University of Florida West Florida Research and Education Center. Topics will include: Improving habitat for wild turkey, natural vegetation management, fall food plot evaluations and spring and summer wildlife planting. Register online at <http://wfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/center/events.htm#>. For more information contact Ms. Robin Vickers at 850-983-5216 ext. 113 or via e-mail at rvickers@ufl.edu.

April 1, 2, and 3, 2005: *Emerald Coast Flower and Garden Festival.* The PJC/UF Milton Campus hosts this 8th annual festival the first weekend of April. The festival includes an indoor flower show competition, vendors that sell plants and garden related items and educational displays. The Santa Rosa County Master Gardeners will be having a plant sale to raise money to support their many community projects and local scholarships.

For persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations, please contact the SRC Extension Office at least 5 working days prior to the program so that proper consideration may be given to the request.
(850) 623-3868

Questions and Answers

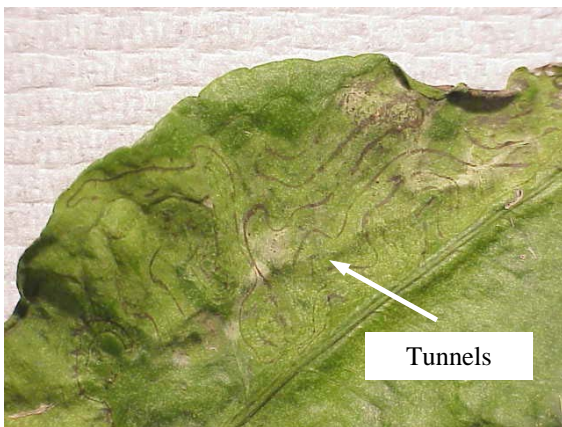
Q: I've been noticing what appears to be tunneling in the leaves of my citrus plant. What's happening?

A: The tunnels are being made by the larva of a small leafmining moth, *Phyllocnistis citrella*, commonly called the citrus leafminer (CLM). CLM was discovered in late May 1993 in several citrus nurseries in south Florida. It now occurs everywhere in Florida where citrus is grown, and has spread to other Gulf Coast areas.

The CLM adults are minute moths (4 mm wing-spread) and not easily noticed. The adult lays her eggs at night on the underside of citrus leaves. The egg hatches within two to 10 days, whereupon larvae immediately enter the leaf and begin feeding. Larvae make serpentine mines on young leaves, resulting in leaf curling and injury. Leaf mines are usually on the ventral leaf surface, except in heavy infestations when both leaf surfaces are used. As with similar leafminers, larvae are protected within the leaf during their feeding cycle.

Symptoms of infestation include leaves with serpentine mines, curling of leaves or a silvery film over the leaf mines.

Fortunately, there are many insects that parasitize the CLM. In Florida, chemical control recommendations are still being evaluated, but biological control (allowing the good bugs to help) and applications of horticultural oil are suitable methods to help reduce populations of CLM.



Q: Is now the time to put out a weed-n-feed product on my lawn?

A: Early March is the right time to put out a pre-emergence herbicide to control summer weeds. However, it's still too early to fertilize our lawn grasses.

Preemergence herbicides are available so you don't have to use a weed-n-feed. If you had a problem last year with summer weeds, I would recommend that you get a preemergence out now and fertilize in April.

Timing is critical when applying preemergence herbicides. We usually will target early March for applications. Specifically, it should be applied when day temperatures reach 65° to 70°F for four or five consecutive days. These application timings generally coincide with blooming of landscape plants such as azalea and dogwood.

Pre-emergence herbicides for lawns are sold under a number of trade names. Be sure to select one that's labeled for use on the turfgrass species you have in your lawn. The tolerance of turfgrass species varies among the different herbicides on the market.

A UF/IFAS publication by Drs. Unruh, Brecke and Trenholm is available and provides several preemergence herbicide options. This publication titled "Weed Management in Home Lawns" is available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP141>.

Below are a few preemergence herbicides that are safe to use on centipede and/or St. Augustine lawns.

Chemical	Brand Name
pendimethalin	Pendulum® Lesco Pre-M® Turf Weedgrass Control® Scotts® Halts® Crabgrass Preventer
dithiopyr	Dimension® StaGreen CrabEx®

Winter Weed Control

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Also, remember that if you have a lot of weeds, you may not have a lot of grass beneath. So, if you are successful at killing the weeds, expect to see bare spots in your lawn afterward. If you don't take good care of your grass so that it will fill those bare spots quickly, you will soon see more weeds filling those spots. Weeds are opportunists. If we put most of our time into concentrating on growing a healthy lawn and less time into killing weeds, we will usually find that the weeds have less opportunities to sprout in our lawn.

—by David W. Marshall, Extension Agent, UF/IFAS Leon County Extension



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