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COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Do you want to avoid summer weeds in your lawns? Now is the time to act.

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

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Last week's warm temperatures were nice after all the cold, but the cool season weeds seemed to explode in my yard in just a few days.

I missed my preemergence application in the fall due to Helene so my lawn weeds are way worse than they should have been. The soil temperature at 2 inches is nearing 48 degrees with air temperatures predicted to be in the mid 50s on the 10-day forecast. I am not expecting the soil temperature to reach the magic 55-degree mark until later this month, which means that we have a couple of weeks to prepare for our preemergence herbicide applications.

We want to get them before they get us.

Annual weeds complete their lifecycles in less than a year and reproduce by seed. Annuals may be further divided into winter (cool season) and summer (warm season) weeds. Winter annuals germinate in the late summer and early fall months, live during the winter and die in the late spring or early summer with higher heat. Good examples include annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*), common chickweed, henbit and spurge.

Summer annuals germinate in the spring months, live during the summer and mature in the fall months and are usually killed with frost. These warm annuals include crabgrass, goosegrass, lespedeza and knotweed.

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The germination of these annual weed seeds is mostly dependent on soil and air temperatures. A soil temperature of 55 degrees is about where we see the switch between cool

season weeds and warm season weeds. Currently, we are about to have a transition period with both warm and cool season annual weeds at the same time.

Since annual weeds are only produced by seed, the best way to control them is to get the seed early. This is where pre-emergence herbicide comes into play.

Pre-emergence herbicides are applied to lawns prior to weed seed germination. Our standard recommendations are Sept. 1-15 for cool season weeds and mid-February to March 1 for warm season weeds. This can vary somewhat depending on weather, like an early spring.

Campbell Vaughn: Learn what 'chill hours' are before adding any plants to your yards

Pre-emergence stops the plant from growing by inhibiting cell division in the shoot and root tips while permitting other cell duplication processes to continue. Allowing this product to disturb the natural germination process is why getting the herbicide out in a timely manner is important.

Some of the common turfgrass pre-emergences have the active ingredient dithiopyr (Dimension) and prodiamine (Barricade). The easiest way to broadcast these products is with a rotary spreader, so get a granulated formula. I also like to get one with the 0-0-7 fertilizer to add a little potassium. We tend to lack potassium in our lawns which is important for root growth and disease resistance.

Different pre-emergences have varying lengths of effectiveness, but three months is a good standard.

Some things to be conscious of concerning pre-emergence herbicides are:

- Apply only according to the written label on the packaging.

- They don't affect a weed that is already present, just the seed.

- Makes sure the product doesn't have high nitrogen levels in it. Weed and feed products are famous for high nitrogen. Most of our plants don't need nitrogen until May.

- Do not apply to an area that is to be a lawn or newly sodded lawn. They will adversely affect the root growth and can kill the sod.

- Do not apply where seeding may take place. This includes over seeding with rye grass seed, new lawn Bermuda and centipede seeds, wildflower seed or vegetable garden areas.

- Make sure that this herbicide gets watered in with about a quarter inch within one to seven days.

There are a few products that can be used in ornamental beds as well as in your turf. It is like killing two birds with one stone.

Preemergence herbicides form the backbone of weed control programs. They do not control all weed seeds that may be present in a landscape, but they are effective for many of the most common weeds. Get it out soon or it will be a long weedy summer.