

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Weed and feed products can be detrimental to your lawns

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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

The high nitrogen content in these products encourages early growth, making the grass vulnerable to cold damage.

Weed and feed products are not effective as pre-emergents and are best used later in the year.

Homeowners should focus on mowing their lawns and wait until later in the spring to address weed control and fertilization.

I stopped by my cousin David's house for a visit the other day and walked through his garage to his back door. And to my dismay, sitting on a hand truck were two bags of "weed and feed".

I shook my head and thought to myself, "I can't even get my family to listen to me." I decided maybe I should give it a try with the readers of my column. Please listen. It is important.

After the Christmas decorations have left the shelves at the big hardware stores, the pallets of "weed and feed" start taking their place. I have an ongoing personal battle with weed and feed products and how they are marketed. I can just hear people saying, "I can get rid of weeds and feed the lawn all at once? Sign me up."

It really sounds great, but you are really doing your grass a disservice. A lot of

these weed and feed products usually have a very good weed control component, but the problem I have is the feed component.

The top five most heavily stocked weed and feed products I saw this past weekend just browsing on my weekly trip to the hardware store and each brand had at least 28% nitrogen. Our warm season grasses do not need nitrogen until May. And in May, our turf grasses really don't need but a small boost of it.

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Every bag of fertilizer is labeled with three numbers. These numbers are the percentages of the three major elements plants use to grow. The first number is nitrogen, followed by phosphorus and then potassium. For example, a bag of 16-4-8 would have 16% nitrogen, 4% phosphorus and 8% potassium. The rest is usually some inert ingredient.

My simple description of how the different elements in fertilizer work on grass is nitrogen makes the grass grow up and potassium makes the grass grow down and phosphorus is not useful at all. Don't get me wrong, phosphorus is important to plants, but not really for turf.

Campbell Vaughn: [Landscaping terms can get confusing. Here's a short guide to help.](#)

The big problem I have with weed and feed is that we get warm weather in the winter in Georgia. It was 70 degrees this week and these warm spells can last a few weeks. Warm late winter temperatures get grass to wake up and start moving, but grass likes to get out of bed like I do - very slowly. All this nitrogen in these products is like starting the morning by drinking three energy drinks before brushing your teeth.

This feeding encourages the grass blades to start moving upward. This new growth is tender and when the eminent freeze happens, the grass blades will get injured. And in severe cases, this freeze can kill the grass.

There are some effective uses for these weed and feed products at the proper time of year, but you really need to know what you are doing to apply them. Don't let these weed and feed products trick you into thinking you are doing a preemergence.

Weed and feed products are mostly formulated for killing existing weeds, and very little for treating the weeds that are waiting to germinate in the spring and invade your yard this coming summer. And most of the weed we have in the yard now are so well established, they are going to laugh at you for trying to poison them.

If you haven't put a pre-emergence out, you probably are too late. If you want to put out a post emergence, you are probably too late. Keep your lawn mowed and we will discuss your next lawn assignment at the end of April.