



# Turf Talk

## *Weeds: Crabgrass, Ground Ivy, Violets, Moss, Nutsedge & Others*

### *Crabgrass*

There is no greater threat to an average lawn than the annual grassy weed we all know... crabgrass. With the ability to produce hundreds upon thousands of seeds per plant each year, crabgrass not only thrives under hot dry conditions, it can take over a lawn in a single season. Crabgrass is a heat-loving plant and thrives when cool-season grasses do not, giving it an edge during July and August. It can seemingly grow inches overnight, popping out of bare lawn patches and along driveways where the sun superheats the soil – ideal crabgrass habitat.

### *Preventative Measures Against Crabgrass*

The single most important preventative measure against crabgrass is something very easy – setting your mowing blade height high to 3" from May – September. Mowing too short heats the soil and allows dormant crabgrass seeds to germinate, especially when blade height is below 2". A healthy, thick lawn simply does not allow any room for crabgrass to grow. A well-balanced lawn care program that includes fertilizer, weed suppression, lime and compost tea is a great defense against crabgrass.

### *Crabgrass Treatments*

For lawns prone to seasonal crabgrass, a barrier can be applied in the spring that will greatly reduce not only crabgrass, but other annual weeds that have not yet germinated. For successful crabgrass control it is essential that the proper product be uniformly applied, at the right time of year and at the appropriate rate of application. In New Hampshire and Vermont, this pre-emergent barrier generally needs to be applied by the end of May depending upon your location and weather conditions. Once June arrives, only special sprays can be used to knock down crabgrass as it continues to grow throughout the summer months. Once fully mature in August, this annual plant stops growing and dies with the fall frost.

### *Ground Ivy & Violets*

Ground ivy, also known as ‘creeping Charlie’, and violets are weeds that are exceedingly difficult to reduce, primarily

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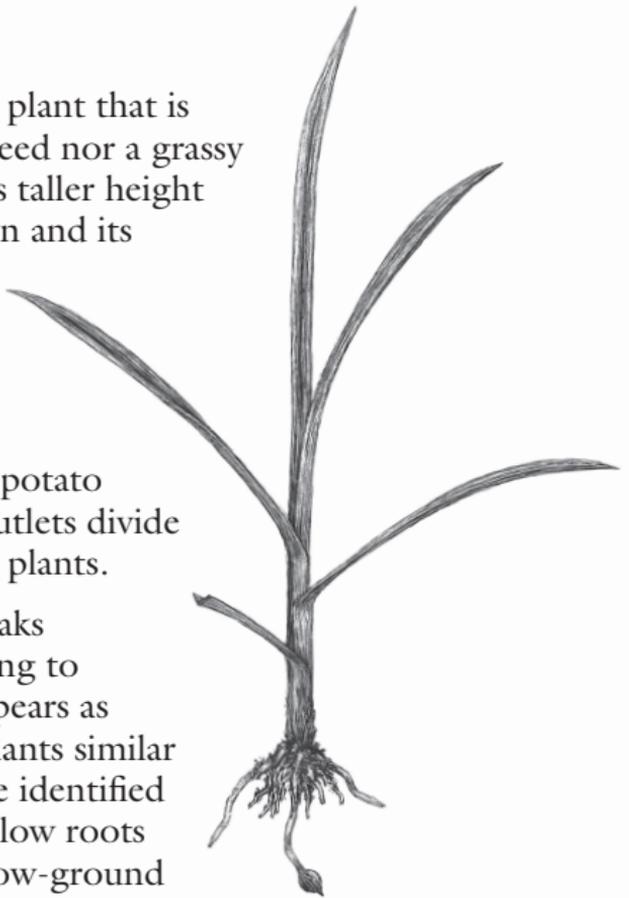
because of the defense their waxy leaves provide. This waxy barrier reduces the ability of the active ingredient in most herbicides from effectively penetrating the leaf surface.

Additionally, since ground ivy and violets grow close to the ground, mowing does not help with thinning. These weeds are also difficult to control when not actively growing during the summer, making fall the best time for treatment. Only a long-term, systematic approach of well-timed sprays with specific materials targeting these weeds will bring about significant results.

## *Nutsedge*

Nutsedge is a unique plant that is neither a broadleaf weed nor a grassy weed. Apparent by its taller height vs. the rest of the lawn and its lighter green color, it is an aggressive perennial that rises from small tubers underground called 'nutlets'. Similar to a potato or flower bulb, the nutlets divide and give rise to more plants.

Nutsedge usually breaks dormancy in late spring to early summer and appears as fast-growing, waxy plants similar to an onion. It can be identified by a purple base, shallow roots and its triangular below-ground stem. Nutsedge usually moves into a lawn from contaminated soil or sod. There are very specialized sprays that knock the top growth back during the summer months. One or two sprays usually result in very good control of the top growth, weakening the nutlets below ground. Only after many seasons of spraying and or hand pulling can nutsedge be effectively eradicated.



## *Moss*

Moss takes over in shady areas where turf grass has a hard time growing primarily due to soil compaction, poor nutrient value and inadequate air circulation. Moss can easily be raked out or sprayed to control. However, once the moss is gone the underlying problems must be addressed with lime, aeration and in particular, seeding with the right grass. Once turf is established, after-care includes compost tea and slow-release fertilizers.

## *Other Broadleaf Weeds*

There are certainly many other broadleaf weeds that may be undesirable, such as dandelions, plantain, clover, chickweed and henbit. Most broadleaf weeds can be controlled simply by mowing your lawn on a weekly basis at 3". In general, broadleaf weeds that can't be controlled by mowing are characterized from easy-to-control to difficult-to-control.

### *Easy-to-Control Broadleaf Weeds*

The vast majority of broadleaf weeds are generally easy to control and can be reduced by a wide variety of materials applied in the spring or fall, when they are actively growing. Weed control products can be liquid or granular with liquid treatments generally producing faster results. Dry products are often a good choice when looking at large lawn areas or playing fields. However, slower results and multiple treatments can be expected when using granular/dry products.

Treating for broadleaf weeds during hot and/or dry weather usually yields poor to minimal results because the plants are not actively growing, making fall and spring the best time for superior results. Many liquid weed sprays if used during times of stress (summer) can actually cause turf roots to become shorter, causing additional stress at the worst possible time when water is in high demand. Shorter roots diminish the ability of turf grass to capture limited moisture in the soil.

### *Difficult-to-Control Broadleaf Weeds*

Broadleaf weeds in this category, such as ground ivy and violets were discussed previously. These weeds require specialized products applied at the proper time of year, often over several seasons, for successful control.

## *Other Grassy Weeds*

The time of the year and the proper identification of the grassy weed is often of critical importance when identifying a grassy weed issue. For example, quackgrass is an aggressive spring perennial that mimics crabgrass causing many homeowners to believe that their lawn is infested with crabgrass. Crabgrass is an annual plant that does not germinate until mid-to-late May in New England. Any grassy-looking weed in the spring or early summer is likely a perennial grassy weed and most definitely not crabgrass. This is an important distinction as control methods differ.

### *Grass as a Weed*

Even grasses that belong in a lawn can be considered a weed if they are out of place. For example, the generally

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wider leaf blade of tall fescue may seem out of place in a lawn mostly containing fine fescue, rye or bluegrass that have much finer blades. Bentgrass and even annual bluegrass can be considered a grassy weed since they look different and brown-out prematurely during stress. Annual bluegrass can be perceived as a weed when it produces a seed head (looking similar to a mini wheat plant) in May to June.

## *Grassy Weed Control Measures*

*Perennial* grassy weeds cannot be controlled by normal control methods, since you cannot just target certain grass varieties while keeping others. Those seeking a solution for out-of-place grasses are often forced to do spot or area renovations. Renovations involve killing off all grasses in an area and then reseeding with a more desirable turf variety.

Most *annual* grassy weeds like crabgrass can easily be prevented by a single treatment in the spring, or at most a secondary spray in the summer for extremely infested lawns.

## *Organic and Natural Products*

There are ever evolving organic and natural products to address both grassy and broadleaf weeds. Most of the newer ones are ideal for use near watersheds, rivers, lakes, and streams. These weed-control products address their target at very specific times of year and under limited weather conditions making the timing and execution of sprays of paramount importance. Ideal treatment conditions are adequate soil moisture and the cool-to-warm weather typically found in the spring and fall. Summer is definitely not the time to spray for weeds unless the weather is unusually cool and wet.

*For help with weed issues, contact us for assistance.*

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