

Annual grass & Annual Weed Control

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There is very little crabgrass in this part of the world, but the area does have Cheat grass and annual foxtail. Annual grasses come from seed every year. These grassy weeds can take over in the lawn. They grow rapidly during the spring as the grass produces seed. The plant dies in July or August in Wyoming, and the seed lies dormant until the following spring. The main annual grasses we need to control are annual blue grass, green foxtail and downy brome or cheat grass, which we see showing up later in March.

Quack grass is another grassy weed in lawns, but it is a perennial grass with hollow stems and wheat-like spikes growing at the tips of the stems. The narrow leaf blades are bluish green and rough on the upper surface. A pair of "claws" occurs at the junction of the blade and the stem. The root system is very fibrous and can grow quite deep. This grass can grow quite tall if not mowed. Quack grass can spread by seed or by its extensive root system.

To control annual grasses one can try to pull it or use pre-emergence (before a plant germinates from seed) or post-emergence (after plants germinate from seed) herbicides. Liquid forms mixed with water and are sprayed on. Dry forms would be administered with a fertilizer spreader. Generally, dry mixes are found with brand name fertilizer mixes and are labeled for crabgrass control and lawn fertilization. March, once the snow goes off, is the time to apply a pre-emergence type of control since seeds have not really started to germinate. This type of control can also help with some other types of annual weeds such as black medic and dandelions. If you keep annual grasses/weeds from going to seed for two years that should almost eliminated the problem.

On any warm day in March, the sooner the better, is the time to apply a pre-emergence herbicide to control annual weeds. Once the ground warms up and the frost leaves the annuals will start to germinate. The advantage of most pre-emergence herbicides is they control a wide range of weeds, which germinate from seed. The other advantage of applying herbicides this time of year is it less likely to damage other plants. There are some pre-emergence herbicides, which will work in the garden and flower beds. Bayer and Spectracide, offer good products, be careful and read the directions.

Controlling quack grass or other non-desirable perennial grasses is another matter. To control seed germination, the previously described method would work but not on the plants already established. The only effective control would be a non-selective herbicide such as Round-Up. The problem with this would be the brown spots left in a lawn.

The only effective way to control a perennial grass, which either has invaded the lawn or has just shown up, is by the previously described method with a non-selective herbicide. Use a small container such as an old paint can, add Round-Up (there are other products made by different companies using the same chemical (glyphosate) but with their own brand name), and use a disposable foam paintbrush to paint it on the undesirable grasses. This can be time consuming but will not leave quite as big brown spots in a lawn as spraying would. This technique can also work in flowerbeds and gardens, since there is no residual with glyphosate.

Remember on these warm March days to drag the hose out and water all perennial plants. As long as the ground is not frozen, the water will soak in and help keep the perennials from breaking dormancy too early and give them some needed moisture.

The University of Wyoming and the United States Department of Agriculture, Sheridan County office, cooperate.