



The Chem Gro Crop Watch, Issue #12, 8/19/19

Nicholas Paulsmeyer, CCA, Sales Agronomist, npaulsmeyer@chemgroil.com, 217-430-1440

Lawn Care

Let's take a break from serious in-field topics to talk about something we don't always find ourselves talking about, lawn care. It's mid-August and some of our grasses have turned brown and are in a semi dormant state due to hot and dry weather. This is completely fine and with more rain and cooler days you should start to see that green color reappears in your landscape. For now, let's just go over a few lawn care topics of importance and I'll touch on a few things to consider.

Mowing

Mowing is one of the more critical operations in lawn care and can make a huge difference in how your grass looks. Modern turfgrass species grow from the base of the grass plant much like many of our species of plants we use for hay do. This makes turfgrass tolerant of mowing operations. Getting the correct mowing height is important in lawn care because mowing a lawn too short allows light to hit the ground and weeds to grow. The picture below demonstrates that point as the lawn on the right is mowed at a higher height than the one on the left. Even with herbicides applied to the lawn the ground ivy on the left side still somehow has taken hold of the lawn. Lower mowing height also means less shade over the growing point of the grass plant. This leads to damaging heat in the summertime and less moisture in the soil. Now on the other side of things, you can mow a lawn too high which can lead to grasses competing with each other for space and it is more likely to get a disease. With this being said, what is the ideal mowing height? As a rule of thumb, turfgrass species need to be mowed at a height of 2.5-3". Personally, I like to shoot for that 3" height to choke out weeds. During summer months, increase that



height by 1/2" to allow for more shade and moisture retention during dry months. Before mowing your lawn check your blades and make sure they are sharp. Clean cut grass leaves recover quicker and are less susceptible to diseases. How often should you mow? Make sure you are only cutting about 1/3rd of the height of your grass when mowing. In order to accomplish this, you might have to cut 2 times in one week during periods of rapid growth. If you are running a little bit behind on work and can't follow this rule you can cut up to half the grass height and do a follow up cutting a little later in the week to get the proper cutting height.

Fertilizer

Your lawn will struggle to grow if not properly fertilized. Start with a soil test to determine the pH, Phosphorus, and Potassium levels in your soil. You can adjust these numbers accordingly at the beginning and end of the year with your nitrogen fertilizer. Nitrogen fertilizer is important, the picture below highlights that. The notes may be a little blurry but the idea is to apply nitrogen during periods of good growth. When applying nitrogen fertilizer, be sure to use the right source of nitrogen at the right time and in an appropriate amount when fertilizing your lawn. As far as

nitrogen fertilizers goes, there are often times 2 forms: slow-release and fast-release nitrogen. Nitrogen fertilizer bought at the store usually have each of these fertilizer amounts listed on the bag. Start fertilizing your lawn with nitrogen as early as March to give it a nice boost coming out of the winter. This is the perfect time to use slow-release nitrogen sources as it gives the grass a small amount of nitrogen fertilizer over a long period of time to help it grow but not excessively. Do not exceed over 1/2 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet as this might cause that excessive growth to occur. Next window for application occurs from May to mid-



June and is again another application of up to 1/2 pound per 1000 square feet. If you are shooting for a nice green lawn, now is the time to apply fertilizers that contain iron. Grasses really respond to iron and will turn a nice dark green once the iron is absorbed into the plant. By late August to the end of September an additional 1/2 to 1 pound of nitrogen can be applied per 1000 square feet to help our struggling grasses get going again after the summer months. This is the perfect time for our more soluble fast-release nitrogen fertilizers. The final application of nitrogen can be made from October until as late as December and should again be around 1/2 to 1 pound of nitrogen. I realize that not everybody has the time to make 4 fertilizer passes every year. In this case, using two application windows from the above mentioned windows should suffice.

Herbicide

No matter how healthy your lawn is, weeds will always find a way to germinate and become a nuisance. So, from time to time we need to apply chemicals to the lawn to either kill or prevent their growth. To save some space I will not be getting into the specifics on what chemical to use for what but I will touch on timing and give a few pointers when you apply your chemicals. At the beginning of its life cycle, when it first germinates and emerges, a weed is easy to kill with our herbicides. Once it has grown that weed is a lot stronger and can tolerate herbicides more easily. This is true no matter what kind of weed we are talking about, whether it is an annual, biennial, or perennial weed. This means early applications are the most effective ones for taking care of weeds. This makes springtime and ideal time for spraying herbicides to control existing weeds. If there aren't any weeds out in your lawn or it hasn't germinated yet, then a preemergent herbicide may be used to prevent weeds from coming up. The best time for preemergent application of chemical in this area is usually around the second half of April when existing weeds are still small and weak and a few weeds we might want to prevent from coming up haven't emerged. In the case of biennial and perennial weeds, there is another application window to remember in the fall. This happens when perennials and biennials start transporting nutrients from their leaves to their roots in anticipation of winter. This usually happens after the first frost occurs in the fall and a chemical application at this time will allow the herbicide to be taken down through the leaf all the way down to the root. During both the spring and fall application windows, make sure to read the chemical label on the product you are using as some chemicals require different surfactants and have labeled restrictions on how much you can use or where they can be used. With any herbicide application, make sure the average daytime temperature is around 50 degrees or else the chemical will work very slowly or performance will suffer.

Insecticide

In general, most lawns in the region don't usually receive heavy insect pressure that would cause a concern. But, from time to time there will be a few areas where white grubs become an issue. These grubs will later turn into the June beetles and Japanese beetles we are familiar with in the area. The best time to target grubs is when they are small and vulnerable. This occurs right after they hatch from eggs deposited in the soil. This makes the end of July and the beginning half of August the perfect time to treat a soil with a systemic insecticide for grubs. If you have missed this window, then an application between April or May might help out. Be on the lookout for products containing imidacloprid or chlorantraniliprole as these work best to prevent the grubs from becoming an issue. Be sure to water in these insecticides after application for best effect.

Final Thoughts

Lawn care can be as much an art as it is a science and what will work for one person won't work for another. The one topic I can't easily touch on is the time each and every person has to devote to their lawn, which will play a huge role in how you manage it. Like always, my job is to give you the best advice possible, what you do with it is up to you.