

Early Spring Dandelion Control Options

April 16, 2015

The yellow flower of a dandelion is a sign that spring is here and summer is around the corner (Fig 1). While that familiar flower is great for spring pollinators, it is often the nemesis of homeowners and turfgrass managers alike. While control is easiest during fall there are a few different control options in spring.

- 1) Leave the dandelions for the pollinators and just mow off the seedheads. While this may be an option, it's not a great way to rid your turf of dandelions and wouldn't be acceptable for highly maintained turf.
- 2) Pull the weeds by hand. This method is more work than spraying but it can be equally or even more effective than spring postemergence herbicides. It's a good and fairly quick option in areas with several dozen dandelions or less. Enjoy a favorite beverage while pulling a few weeds. Just 10 minutes a day for a week can be a great way to eradicate those pesky weeds. Use a weed puller to remove as much of the long taproot as possible. Some dandelions may grow back but complete control with herbicides wouldn't be 100% effective either.
- 3) Use postemergence herbicides in late spring (after the plants have flowered). Pre-flower applications of herbicide are not very effective.



Figure 1. Yellow dandelion flowers are a sure sign of spring.

Herbicides containing 2,4-D, dicamba and MCPP can work well on dandelions. Combination of traditional active ingredients with products containing carfentrazone, triclopyr or fluroxpyr increase the speed of burn down, expand the spectrum of weeds controlled, and/or improve overall control. Spot-treat small areas rather than apply a blanket application to the whole lawn when possible. Be extremely careful when applying these herbicides near ornamentals or trees that are flowering or soon to break bud because they can be easily damaged by direct overspray or indirectly by volatilization of herbicide. The downside to this method is that those pesky yellow flowers will be around this spring which reduces customer satisfaction for lawn care operators. Another option for LCOs is to apply florasulam (Defendor, Dow AgroSciences) in early spring. This herbicide provides some postemergence control and prevents seedheads for forming. Finally, non-traditional methods like treatment with vinegar is not very effect and definitely not legal.

Remember, the best way to limit weeds like dandelion is to grow a healthy turf stand. Proper fertilization, timely irrigation, and consistent mowing are essential to combat the invasion of dandelions. This is especially true of newer grass varieties than can have higher fertility requirements (Fig. 2).

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Elite Kentucky Bluegrass

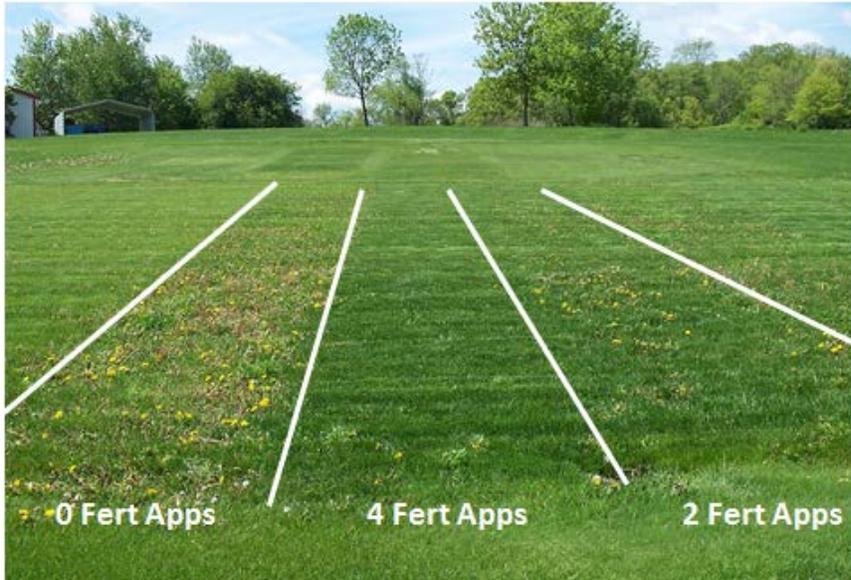


Figure 2. The best way to battle weed invasion is to grow a healthy lawn. That includes proper nitrogen fertilization to sustain high stand density. Newer 'elite' Kentucky bluegrass generally need more fertilizer to sustain turfgrass quality and crowd out weeds. Older varieties generally need less fertilizer but may not have the same dark green color. These plots did not receive any PRE or POST herbicide for three years.

Common Kentucky Bluegrass

