

Post Rock Answers

By Cassie Thiessen April 17, 2026

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Steps for a Weed Free Lawn

Weeds have a way of popping up in lawns and gardens, no matter how often we pull them. This year, stay one step ahead by using a crabgrass preventer before weeds take hold. Pre-emergent herbicides are great because they kill weeds before they become large plants. It's often more effective than trying to spray something once your yard is full of weeds or trying to pull them out by hand. Follow these steps for a weed free lawn.

Crabgrass preventers are another name for pre-emergence herbicides, they prevent crabgrass seeds from developing into mature plants. Many people have a somewhat foggy idea of how they work and assume they kill the weed seed. Such is not the case. They do not kill the seed or even keep the seed from germinating but rather kill the young plant after it germinates. Therefore, they do not prevent germination but prevent emergence.

Crabgrass preventers are just that – preventers. With few exceptions, they have no effect on existing crabgrass plants, so they must be applied before germination. Additionally, preventers do not last forever once applied to the soil. Microorganisms and natural processes begin to gradually break them down soon after they are applied. If some products are applied too early, they may have lost much of their strength by the time they are needed. Most crabgrass preventers are fairly ineffective after about 60 days, but there is considerable variation among products. (Dimension and Barricade last longer.)

For north central Kansas, crabgrass typically begins to germinate around May 1st, but could be earlier this year. April 15th is normally a good target date for applying preventer because it gives active ingredients time to evenly disperse in the soil before crabgrass germination starts. For an even more accurate application, base timing on the bloom of ornamental plants. The Eastern Redbud tree is a good choice for this purpose. When the trees in your area approach full bloom, apply crabgrass preventer. A follow-up application will be needed about 8 weeks later unless you are using Dimension or Barricade. Products that do require a follow-up application include pendimethalin (Scotts Halts) and Team (Hi-Yield Crabgrass Control).

Dimension and Barricade are the only two products that give season-long control of crabgrass from a single application. In fact, they can be applied much earlier than April 15th and still have sufficient residual strength to last the season. Barricade can even be applied in the fall for crabgrass control the next season

Dimension can be applied as early as March 1st. Though Dimension is usually not applied as early as Barricade, it is the herbicide of choice if it must be applied later than recommended. It is the exception to the rule that pre-emergence herbicides do not kill existing weeds. Dimension can kill crabgrass as long as it is young (two- to three-leaf stage). Dimension is also the best choice if treating a lawn that was planted late last fall. Normally a pre-emergence herbicide is not recommended unless the lawn has been mowed two to four times. But Dimension is kind to young tall fescue, perennial ryegrass, and Kentucky bluegrass seedlings and some formulations can be applied as early as two weeks after the first sign of germination. However, read the label of the specific product you wish to use to ensure that this use is allowed. Lawns established in the fall can be safely treated with Dimension the following spring even if they have not been mowed.

Note that when you are out shopping for herbicides, some may be sold using the common name or active ingredient rather than the trade name. The common chemical name for Dimension is dithiopyr and Barricade is prodiamine. Remember, when using any pesticide, read the label and follow instructions carefully.

We recommend crabgrass preventers be applied before fertilizer so that the grass isn't encouraged to put on too much growth too early. However, it may be difficult to find products that contain pre-emergents without fertilizer. Those that don't contain fertilizer are pendimethalin, sold as Scotts Halts. Team (Benefin + Trifluralin) sold as Hi-Yield Crabgrass Control. Dimension sold as Hi-Yield Turf & Ornamental Weed and Grass Stopper, Bonide Crabgrass & Weed Preventer.

Make sure to get ahead of weeds this season and implement proper control. If you have any questions about how to care for your lawn this season, reach out to your local Extension Office.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at cchiessen@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit (785-738-3597).

