Weed and Feed Trap

It usually begins slowly, creeping up on me over a couple weeks. It starts with the mulch. It needs to be refreshed. Then it progresses to the window boxes. They need to be gorgeous. Finally, it moves to the lawn. It needs to be immaculate. Spring fever has taken over, and I no longer have control! From potting soil to weed control, I will buy whatever it is. Just give me a sale and a convincing commercial. I am officially a gardening sap.

Each year I tell myself, things are going to be different. I will not fall for their fancy packaging and catchy commercials. I will use my education and stand firm against their claims of ‘weed free’ lawns. I know better than to use a fertilizer and an herbicide at the same time on centipede grass in April. I will… Wait a second, fertilizer and weed control in one easy treatment? But, that IS a deal.

If you are like me and cannot resist a good bargain, then I am sure you have been tempted by the latest ‘weed and feed’ claims. But, let me caution you, do not fall victim to their captivating slogans.

Centipede grass is one of the easiest lawns to care for, and there in lies the problem. Spring comes, and homeowners scramble for something to put on their lawn. It would seem the ideal time to give it a boost. But, whether it is fertilizer, or an herbicide, spring is the wrong time to apply.

Centipede grass requires very little fertilizer. It is recommended that you apply ½ lb. of nitrogen per 1000 square feet using a high potassium fertilizer like a 5-5-15, or 8-8-24 in mid-June. So keeping this recommendation in mind, take a look at a bag of ‘weed and feed’ the next time you are at the local garden center. Even the products designed for southern lawns are high in nitrogen with fertilizer ratios like 29-1-10. Although this high rate of nitrogen will give centipede grass a quick initial boost, it will also lead to disease and overall health problems in your lawn.

Weeds are everywhere this time of year, including my front lawn. Many of you may not know this, but my husband has a Bachelors degree in turfgrass management. You would think, between the two of us, we should have a beautiful, weed free, intricate landscape. However, that is not the case. We are like the carpenter whose house is falling in around him. Our front lawn is loaded with clover, and I am itching to get out there and kill it. But, education prevails and I have resisted so far.
April brings the green-up of centipede grass. During green-up, centipede grass is very susceptible to herbicide damage. Chemicals such as atrazine and 2,4-D that are recommended for use on centipede grass will cause damage if used during this time. To obtain weed control, it is recommended that you apply atrazine as a pre-emergent weed control no later than early March. Post-emergent weed control, with a product like 2,4-D, for broadleaf weeds should be applied in mid-May. Herbicides should not be applied during April when centipede grass is turning green.

Manufacturers work hard to create catchy slogans and flashy advertising, but the science behind the product is not always sound. Before you head off to the local garden center to purchase your next lawn product, think of the science behind what you are planning to do. Is it really the time to put out that fertilizer or herbicide? Or are you falling for the showy packaging?

To receive a copy of the Centipede Grass Lawn Maintenance Calendar, for any questions or comments on this or any other horticultural issue, please contact Kerrie Roach, Extension horticultural agent, at 910-671-3276, by E-mail at kerrie_roach@ncsu.edu, or visit the North Carolina Cooperative Extension website at robeson.ces.ncsu.edu

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