

News Article

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We'll Soon See Those Familiar Yellow Flowers

Soon many of our lawns will be blooming with a familiar yellow flower – the dandelion. To naturalists in the reading audience, they would say that there are many ways to utilize dandelions. To most homeowners, they would say it's a weed. For those homeowners, here are a few facts and tips on controlling dandelions.

Dr. Aaron Patton, Turfgrass Extension Specialist at Purdue University, posted dandelion on Purdue's *Turf Tips* blog as a past "weed of the month."

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), is a broadleaf perennial weed that can be found in lawns, nursery crops, and landscapes throughout the United States. Dr. Patton said it has the ability to survive many different soil types, environmental conditions, and management practices; thus, it is a commonly found weed in lawns throughout the northern half of the U.S.

Dr. Patton stated that dandelions generally appear in early spring as they regrow from a few overwintering leaves and their taproot.

"Dandelion produces a strong taproot and the plant has the capability to regenerate from surviving taproot segments (so hoeing a dandelion from your garden may not actually kill the plant)," said Patton. "The survivability of this taproot helps to make dandelion a very prevalent and 'difficult to completely control' weed in lawns in Indiana, even following herbicide applications."

"Yellow-brown fruit (flowers) are formed into a conspicuous, globe-like, white seedhead with light, feathery ends capable of easy dispersal by the wind," said Patton. "Each seedhead is capable of producing 140 to 190 individual viable seed, which helps to contribute to the vast populations of dandelion located in lawns throughout the Midwestern United States." To many children, they are simply known as "puffballs," and, of course, they enjoy picking them and blowing on them like the act of blowing bubbles.

The University of Wisconsin's Cooperative Extension Weed Science Department posted this about dandelion on their website, "A single plant can produce more than 2000 seeds. One estimate is that more than 240,000,000 seeds/acre could be produced annually by a dense stand of dandelions." One can quickly see why dandelion is a perennial problem in home lawns, even if you have achieved good control in the past.

Dr. Patton described control strategies that can be employed for dandelion in lawns:

*Cultural control: None known specifically for dandelion. Digging up as much of the taproot as possible will improve control. Dandelion knives and other similar tools are available for removing individual plants with very little disturbance to the soil. These tools, however, are only effective when all the taproot is removed. Adjusting fertilization practices to minimize the amount of potassium (K) or potash (K₂O) may help to reduce dandelion populations, but this process is very slow to generate results (many years). Management practices such as increased mowing heights, fertility, and irrigation may help to produce a dense vigorous turf capable of outcompeting germinating dandelion plants.

*Chemical control: Many herbicides effectively control dandelions, especially those that contain 2,4-D. Fall is the best time to control perennial broadleaves like dandelion, and both amine or ester formulations of 2,4-D provide optimum dandelion control in the fall. If dandelions are problematic in the spring, dandelion control can be optimized in the cooler months (April) by using ester formulations of broadleaf herbicides, or by using florasulam (Defendor). However, even ester formulations can be ineffective if applied too early.

Specific timing of a spring-applied herbicide (the second-best time of year) is when dandelions are in flower and some are in the puffball stage (just past flowering). Fall is always the best time for control.

Access Dr. Patton's original post of this article, complete with additional details and pictures, at: <http://purdueturftips.blogspot.com/>.

References to products in this article do not indicate an endorsement to the exclusion of other products that may have similar uses. When using a pesticide, always follow all label directions.