

Unusual early spring and crabgrass

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As everyone has probably noticed, it's unusually warm right now. But, how warm is it? Consider this: If the forecast holds up, by the end of this week (Friday March 23), the monthly mean temperature in Columbus, OH will be 53.5 degrees, which is the normal monthly mean for April. Also, we will have had 9 days in the 70's, two of which will be at or just above 80 degrees, which is similar to what we saw in the whole month of April last year. In addition, if one looks out the window they will see not only Forsythia in full bloom (our indicator plant that tells us it's time to put down preemergence herbicide) but also cherry trees and Bradford pears. Cherry trees normally do not bloom in central Ohio until the 3rd week of April.

Soil temperatures this morning (March 19) are 57 degrees in central Ohio. What is unusual is that Kentucky bluegrass is just barely out of dormancy, but soil temperatures will be warm enough this week, theoretically, for crabgrass to germinate. I say theoretically because we've not seen crabgrass in Columbus in March before and all of the other phenological indicators are so out of alignment (no model shows cornelian cherry dogwood, forsythia, cherries, and magnolias in full bloom simultaneously). But, importantly, soil temperatures will be warm enough this week for crabgrass to germinate.

Bottom line: get your preemergence out as soon as possible. Remember, even if you see some crabgrass, new plants will continue to germinate up until the first part of July, so at least the preemergence herbicide can prevent subsequent germination. Don't rely just on a post product on these sites. Also, there is always a chance that a late frost will knock out some of the early germinating crabgrass.

You should consider the use of a product that offers both pre and postemergence control. Dimension is a great choice, as is Echelon or Cavalcade PQ. If you decide to use Echelon or Cavalcade PQ, I would wait until crabgrass is 1-4 leaf (which looks to be sometime in mid-late April this year). That way the quinclorac will take out the early crabgrass, plus you won't have to be as concerned with premature breakdown of the preemergence herbicide. If you have the materials on hand, you can also combine prodiamine with Tenacity herbicide and this will give both pre and postemergence crabgrass control.

All of the above advice could be rendered unnecessary if we have a turn in the weather to more normal or below normal temperatures. However, there is nothing from the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center (which has been remarkably accurate the past several years) to suggest that this current trend of above normal temperatures is going to end anytime soon. Plan your spring as though everything is 3-4 weeks ahead of last year.