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Do You Have Grassburs in Your Lawn?

By Marty Morgan

Well I get numerous calls every spring and summer about how to get rid of stickerburs in the lawn. The first thing I ask is what kind of soil and grass do you have and how thick or dense is it? Where are you located, in the city or out in the country, it does make a difference for obvious reasons. Good Lawn management is key and If a person has a well-maintained lawn with proper fertilization, mowing and irrigation, it will more than likely be dense enough to prevent many grassburs from becoming a real problem in the first place. And that person usually lives in the city or a housing development, but not always the case. I don't usually get that answer when someone calls complaining about stickers, although there are exceptions to every call. Most of the time it's the opposite and the person's answer is, I don't fertilized much and sometimes not at all, I mow and keep it real short, I don't irrigate much trying to save water (and that's very applaudable). So if your that person that has a dense plush lawn you likely only have spots or areas where the grassburs are a problem and they are likely not many of them. You could probably get by with a little exercise and pull or hoe them up and keep them out without using any herbicides. There are those that are against using any form of chemicals to kill or control them and I tell them to start a good fertilizer program, mow a little higher and water the grass to encourage growth to become denser, and then, get out there and start pulling or hoeing because that is your only option now. And that is also your only option after they head out! So yes, I am giving you advice to get a head of next year's crop by getting your lawn in great shape from now until winter, there's plenty of time. If that is not your priority then you need to pay attention to this next section. If you still have problems with grassburs or that is not a top priority to have a beautiful lawn then let's talk herbicides to help control and hopefully over a few years you will not have many come up each year. The most effective and efficient method of control is to use a pre-emergent herbicide. To be effective, these pre-emergents need to be applied before weed seeds germinate which generally here in north Texas is when the soil temperature (Not the actual air temperature) reaches 55 plus degrees F. This usually occurs by the end of March to the first week in April depending on the weather that particular year. Now if we have a warmer winter than normal, they could come out a little earlier than normal so be on your toes and be ready to apply when needed. I always tell the ranchers have your herbicides and spray equipment ready and waiting while watching the weather patterns. Because timing is everything when applying herbicides whether pre or post be ready. Pre-emergents are available in two different forms-liquid or granular. I prefer the granular myself and think it works the best since it falls on the soil instead of sticking to the leaves and debris like liquids do. The only thing is it must be watered in once applied so as to form a germination barrier, but hey that's no big deal. But not applying enough water after application of a pre-emergent herbicide is one of the main reasons for failure. One of the best pre-emergent products out there are one's with Dithiopyr as the active ingredient. Dithiopyr is found in many types of pre-emergent lawn products and does a great job controlling many grassy weeds for up to 3-4 months, and yes even the ole sticker bur. One I use is called Dimension EC containing 12.7% Dithiopyr and does a fantastic job if applied at the right time(2-4 weeks before germination) and at the suggested rate. Two applications should be made 6 weeks apart for optimal control. What I really like is that Dimension gives some post-emergent control so one product is all I need for both pre and post. Other similar Pre-E products with sandbur control listed are Balan(Benefin), Barracade (Prodiamine), PreM(pendimethalin). As for post-emergents folks used to use MSMA or DSMA on lawns but it's dangerous if improperly used, so just leave it alone. Its for golf courses and turf farms but it will definitely kill Sandburs. I recommend just sticking to the Pre-Emergents as they will do a better job of control for you in the long run. Always READ and FOLLOW the LABEL! The LABEL is the LAW!