

Crabgrass

Identification, Growth Habit & Control

Crabgrass is the common name for a genus of plants (*Digitaria*) that can invade lawns and turf areas, sprawling across the ground alongside desirable grasses and competing for available nutrients as it grows. Crabgrass can grow quickly and make your turf areas look unsightly in just a few weeks.



Digitaria sanguinalis

Identification

Crabgrass basically looks like a clump of wide-bladed, light green grass. Within turf areas, it is usually easily identifiable by the contrast of its wide blades compared with the relatively thin blades of most turf grasses here in Arizona.

Growth Habits

Crabgrass grows in a prostrate pattern – the lower stems spread across the ground and can eventually grow to over 24” tall if left un-mowed. The stems have swollen nodes. Crabgrass can develop roots at these nodes and form small colonies where establishment is allowed. Leaf blades are covered in small hairs. Flowers have 3-5 spikes. Root system is fibrous.

Crabgrass is a warm season weed that usually begins to emerge in in the spring and continues to grow and produce numerous seeds until the first frost in the fall. It is a very opportunistic weed that grows best in wet soils with high salt content that get plenty of sun – basically anywhere that bermudagrass likes to grow, Crabgrass will also thrive here in Arizona.

Control Methods

Maintain healthy, dense turf areas:

Crabgrass can fill in where turf areas have bare spots, and then out-compete the existing turfgrass to become an established eye sore. Maintain healthy, dense turf areas so that Crabgrass is unable to gain a foothold and begin to grow.

Pre-emergent herbicide control:

Crabgrass can be controlled prior to germination through the timely application of appropriate pre-emergent herbicides to the target area. Here in Arizona, we recommend applying pre-emergent to control Crabgrass in early spring once night time temperatures exceed approximately 55 degrees for three consecutive nights. Use a granular, selective pre-emergent herbicide with the following active ingredients: *bensulide*, *dithiopyr*, *pendimethalin*, and *prodiamine*. If applied properly prior to germination, pre-emergent herbicide can prevent Crabgrass from establishing in new areas.

Post-emergent herbicide control:

Once established, Crabgrass is a notoriously difficult weed to control. A single Crabgrass plant can grow as many as 700 stems and produce up to 150,000 seeds during its life cycle. While broad-spectrum, non-selective herbicides such as *glyphosate* are effective, it is not always possible/desirable to use these chemicals on Crabgrass because they will kill the underlying turfgrass as well. We recommend using a selective (meaning that it only kills certain plants) post-emergent herbicide to control Crabgrass such as Quinclorac, along with an appropriate surfactant to help the chemical stick to the leaf blades. A selective herbicide such as this will kill the Crabgrass while leaving the underlying turfgrass unaffected.

Mechanical removal:

Crabgrass can also be removed by hand or with the use of a tool such as a hula-ho. NOTE – mechanical removal can cause Crabgrass to dump its seeds when removed, causing more to grow in the area.