

Control Crabgrass with Corn Gluten Meal

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With the calendar starting to tell us it's spring, there is a lot of thought going into the upcoming summer's lawn and garden. Many people automatically apply a chemical crabgrass preventer every spring—whether they need it or not. Other people live with crabgrass because they don't want to use chemicals on their lawn. Everyone should consider available options when planning for lawn weed control.

First, if you choose to apply a chemical crabgrass preventer, apply it only where you have a crabgrass problem. Typically this is along driveways or walks where turfgrass is stressed and crabgrass is able to squeeze in. Through the rest of the lawn, however, if your turfgrass is healthy, crabgrass won't be a problem. You can save yourself time and money by applying herbicides **ONLY** where they are needed.

On the other hand, we might all try applying corn gluten meal to our lawns to control crabgrass and other weeds! What's corn gluten meal? Officially, it's the first effective "organic" herbicide. The EPA has granted an exemption from registration as a pesticide for corn gluten meal. It is a product of the wet milling process, often used in animal feed. It is effective as a pre-emergent herbicide because it inhibits root formation during germination. It is labeled for control of crabgrass, barnyardgrass, foxtails, dandelion, lambsquarters, pigweed, purslane and smartweed, and may be effective against even more weeds.

Corn gluten meal is in a granular form, very similar to other lawn products. It can be put in a broadcast or drop spreader and applied just like other fertilizers and herbicides. It stops seeds from germinating. You would **NOT** apply it when seeding a new lawn, because it would stop your lawn grass seeds from germinating as well! But, on established lawns, when applied at 20 lbs per 1000 feet, studies have shown 60% control the first year, 80% control the second year, and 90+% control thereafter. It will also prevent weed seeds from germinating in your flower and vegetable gardens.

As a bonus, corn gluten meal is about 10% nitrogen, so as it decomposes, it acts like a slow-release nitrogen fertilizer and will feed your grass while controlling weeds!! Applications in early to mid-spring and early August will control two flushes of crabgrass and provide an overall nitrogen effect. And, of course, since it's nothing but corn, it's safe for kids, pets, etc.

Corn gluten meal is sold under several trade names, and is becoming more and more available. It's the same corn gluten meal sold at feed mills for animal feed, but it is typically pelletized for easier application. You might be able to get it cheaper at your local feed mill!

Crabgrass is an annual grass that shows up in mid-May. You must put any crabgrass preventer on **BEFORE** the seeds germinate in order to have control. Crabgrass seeds germinate when soil temperatures are between 60 and 65 degrees. Usually you can plan on applying pre-emergent control when the forsythia's yellow flowers are in full bloom. (This year the forsythia are very early, and they are not a good indicator of soil temperature.) Once crabgrass has germinated, neither chemical pre-emergent crabgrass preventers nor corn gluten meal will control it.