Treat weeds before they appear in the landscape

Springtime is just around the corner. While we’re all looking forward to seeing new growth in the garden, most gardeners aren’t excited about the possibility of finding weeds taking up space. It’s a good time of year to think about weed control before weed seed germination.

Homeowners have the option of applying herbicides themselves or hiring a local spray company. Either way, pre-emergence herbicides applied before weed seed germination can help keep annual grass and broadleaf weeds under control. Remember, though, pre-emergence herbicides won’t control perennial weeds or annual weeds that are already growing.

Considering the mild temperatures we’ve had this winter, there’s a good chance homeowners may be experiencing some weed growth already. Hopefully the blast of winter weather last week will take care of some of those weeds.

From about mid-February through the end of March is the optimal time to apply pre-emergence herbicides. For those who like to plan ahead, make a note to treat for winter annual weeds from early September through October.

The pre-emergence products available at the local gardening store will last from four to six weeks or even three or four months, depending on the product itself, as well as the weather when it was applied. Some products may require a second application to provide control all season.

Pre-emergence products are applied to the soil, usually as dry granules. However, some come in liquid form. Tilling the soil prior to application allows better penetration and distribution of the herbicides in the soil, and they typically work better in moist soil. Homeowners will need to irrigate by hand or with a sprinkler system with up to 1 inch of moisture to activate the product, or it must be mechanically incorporated to be fully effective. Each product has different application procedures so be sure to read and follow all label directions for best results.

It’s best to avoid disturbing the soil after application, either by foot traffic or by cultivation, as this can cause the application to fail.

Weeds can build up a resistance when the same herbicide is used over and over again. You may need to switch up the products from time to time. Something else to consider is avoid using pre-emergence products in areas in which you plan to grow plants from seed. These products affect many germinating seeds, not just the weeds. This is why it’s important to read and follow all label directions.
For those who have tried various products without much success, consider hiring a commercial applicator. They have access to additional chemicals not available to homeowners that may have a more desirable effect.

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