

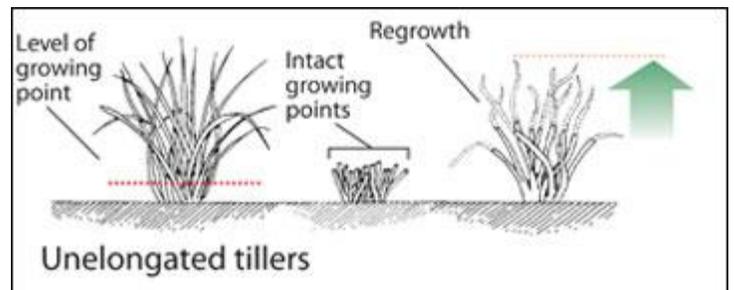


The Chem Gro Crop Watch, Issue #5, 9/15/14

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As we all patiently wait for the rains to stop, and wait for the grain moisture content in our corn and soybean crops to dry down to start harvesting; now is a great time to consider paying attention to another crop.....your yard! It seems very often a lot of people are not happy with their yards because of problem areas such as weeds and thin spots in the grass. These problem areas are many times created by the owner's them-selves not knowing how to properly maintain a healthy yard. The following are pointers that I have learned and practiced over the years that anybody can apply to their own lawn.

- **Mower deck height setting**. This one simple decision in determining how short to mow a yard can greatly impact the overall health of yard. Unfortunately this is one decision that most people that I see are doing wrong! To know why the mower deck height setting is so important is to first understand how a grass plant grows. All



grass species grow from an intercalary meristem, which is the growing point of the plant (the red dotted line in the first left picture). Depending on the grass species, these growing points are generally 1-2 inches above the soil. Grass that is cut above these growing points are able to regrow rapidly and normally. However, if the grass is cut too short (scalped) right at or below the growing point it creates a whole onslaught of problems for your yard:

- Grass cut at or below the growing point now has to “regrow” the growing point. This takes a considerable amount of time, requires reserve energy stored in the roots, and is a big stress to the plant. If you have seen pastures overgrazed by livestock, (particularly horses and sheep since they have front teeth that can bite very close to the ground), you will notice that the grass takes a long time to recover and will not produce like it should.
- Grass cut too short will not handle drought and heat stress as compared to grass that is cut taller. Taller grass seems to insulate or keep the roots cooler from direct hot sunshine. Taller cut grass will stay greener longer under droughty conditions.
- Grass cut too short invites weeds! Short grass that struggles to regrow allows sunlight to hit the soil. This in turn lets weeds flourish and be direct competition to your yard.

What is the correct mowing height? I personally would never set a mower deck height below 3 inches to the ground level. I mow my own yard at 3.25 – 3.5 inches. I like to change the height every once in a while to mow the dead tips out of the crowns of the grass. For many, mowing grass to 3.5 inches tall would be a life changing adjustment and would not feel normal. However in time your yard will respond to the taller cuttings and will slowly begin to thicken up in the thin population areas. Keeping sharp mower blades also seems to help with the grass as it cuts the blades of grass instead of tearing the grass off.

- **Weed control.** To have a weed free yard, you first need to understand the weeds that you are wanting to eliminate. You will most likely have two types of weeds in your yard, annual and perennial weeds. Annual weeds germinate from seeds every year (such as crabgrass). Perennial weeds survive the winter and regrow from the same plant year after year (dandelions, creeping charlie, white clover).

- Perennial weeds. In the spring, herbicide applications are only marginally effective in controlling these weeds (dandelions, creeping charlie, and white clover). These weeds in the spring are growing from stored energy in the roots that was made from the previous fall. Herbicides have a hard time translocating to the roots to kill the plant as the net energy flow of the plant is starting from the roots and going to the newly developing leaves. **However, as we are entering into early fall, NOW is an**



excellent time to kill these perennial weeds as the leaves are moving carbohydrates into the roots preparing the plant to overwinter for another year. A fall application of herbicide will kill these weeds at the roots as they overwinter. This is the best way to prevent your yard from looking like the above picture come next spring. Herbicide products such as Trimec Classic, which contains 2-4D and Dicamba, is an excellent choice in killing broadleaf weeds and is safe to your yard.

- Annual weeds. The cheapest way to kill annual weeds in your yard, such as crabgrass (or commonly referred to as water-grass), is to use a granular herbicide and broadcast it into your yard. I would recommend using a fertilizer that is impregnated with the herbicide, such as a product called Barricade. This is a win/win scenario for your yard as the fertilizer will encourage the grass to thicken up which will help prevent weeds from germinating. Also, the herbicide will kill annual weeds as they germinate. Crabgrass germinates every year from seed, but will not grow until the soil gets above 50 degrees. Applying a product like Barricade in April to early May is the best timing for crabgrass control. However, do not try to inter-seed your yard with lawn seed after this type of herbicide application. The herbicide cannot tell the difference between crabgrass seed and lawn seed. It will kill them both! Thickening your yard with additional lawn seed should be done in the fall. The Labor Day time frame in late August through early September is a good time to inter-seed a lawn, or start from scratch.

