

Weed Management Strategies for Maintaining Good Quality Turfgrasses: Economic Impact

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Turfgrass offers Californians a number of benefits. For one, it is aesthetically pleasing and adds value to the home or office. Turfgrasses help cool the surrounding environments, dampen noise, provide oxygen, and act as a great filtration system as materials pass through its fibrous root zone.

The lawn is an investment both at the onset and ongoing as it is maintained. Initially, there is the cost of site preparation and installation. When done wisely, a solid foundation is set to maintain the site over the years. Economically, it is less expensive to maintain the investment with good cultural practices including proper watering, mowing height and frequency, and good nutrition. Cultural practices plus good scouting for potentially damaging weed, insect, or disease pest can extend the lifetime of your lawn.

Knowledge is valuable. Knowing the turfgrass type, its strengths and weaknesses, and potential damaging pest problems will help one plan better. Some grasses thrive in the summer heat, while others barely hang on. Knowing the historical pest problems for the area will also be key in planning and prevention. When turf density diminishes following a given stress event (disease, insect, under-watering, scalping, etc.) an opportunity arises for weed invasion. As time passes, the surrounding environment will change overtime as the landscape plantings mature and produce more shade over the lawn.

Initially, site selection and planting materials will determine what potentially difficult weeds are present in the landscape. Nutsedge is notorious for sneaking into sites that had no prior history of the noxious weed. Bermudagrass can also spring up in a tall fescue or bluegrass lawn because the old plant material was not killed out first or the incoming soil and plant material was contaminated.

A healthy, dense lawn will have fewer weed problems. Weeds are often present because the density decreased following a cultural or pest related damaging event. In the case of crabgrass, good turf density helps, but is not sufficient in keeping out unwanted tufts of crabgrass. Economically it is much better to place a pre-emergent down in February to prevent successful establishment of the weed than to go out with multiple applications of MSMA in the summer to selectively remove it out of the grass. Keep in mind that the turf may also become discolored temporarily with the post crabgrass treatments. When the turf does become thin, aeration followed by reseeding or resodding can help shore up the turf quality and density.

A turfgrass manager can save time and money by knowing his/her site, plant materials, environmental conditions, local pest history, and cultural activities that favor the establishment and continued vigor of the turfgrass over the competing elements. Planning and proper execution will determine the success and longevity of the turfgrass stand.