

High-Traffic Weeds

Q&A



Have questions? Send them to Dave at: ISU, Hort. Dept., Ames, IA 50011.

by Dr. Dave Minner

The high-traffic areas of my Kentucky bluegrass field are covered with crabgrass and knotweed. How can I kill the weeds in these areas without harming the turf seed I routinely plant in the spring?

These weeds are tell-tale signs of thin turf caused by too much traffic. First, try to reduce the traffic and allow sufficient time to reestablish grass.

Fall seeding of cool-season grasses is usually more successful than spring seeding. Seed in the fall, and don't use the field until the following fall. I know you've heard that before, and I know what your reply is going to be, so let's go to another option.

Remember, it takes nearly one complete year from the time of seeding to develop a turf that is mature enough to compete with weeds and withstand repeated traffic. Sod is often a good solution in excessively thin areas, where seeding never seems to establish a sufficient stand of grass.

The following are strategies that have been successful when spring seeding cool-season grasses on intense-traffic areas.

- First, you need to make a decision about the existing turf. Let's suppose there is about 50-percent turf cover in the high-traffic areas. You decide to keep the existing grass and increase turf cover by overseeding. You also know that knotweed and crabgrass will cover the area by summer if you don't use a herbicide. Does this sound familiar?

You don't notice knotweed covering the bare ground until summer, but it actually germinates very early in the spring. Check for knotweed seedlings in the beginning of March. Spray a post-emergent broadleaf weed killer while the seedlings are very young and in the two-leaf stage.

Low rates of ester formulations give effective control of knotweed under cool conditions, and still allow you to reseed safely. One month after herbicide application, you can overseed or renovate with your normal practices of drill seeding, slicing, coring, or topdressing.

For spring seeding, I use a high percentage of rye in the seed mix. It establishes faster and is less susceptible to herbicide injury than other seed varieties. I like to seed an 80-percent ryegrass / 20-percent Kentucky bluegrass mix at eight pounds per 1000 square feet.

Immediately after seeding, apply Siduron for pre-emergent control of crabgrass. It must be applied before you see any sign of crabgrass germination. This two-fisted approach may not kill all of the crabgrass and knotweed, but it will suppress the weeds and give your new seed a chance to establish in the spring and early summer.

A second application of Siduron is usually needed about a month after the first. When used properly, Siduron does not harm seedling cool-season turfgrass.

The post-emergence herbicide, Bromoxynil, can also be safely used as a broadleaf herbicide on seedling cool-season grasses. However, it only provides partial control of knotweed.

- Now let's suppose you decide that the stand of grass is so thin in your high-traffic areas, that it's not even worth keeping. Simply allow the knotweed and crabgrass to germinate, and then kill the young weeds with a non-selective application of Round-up or Finale. After killing the weeds and existing thin turf non-selectively, you can elect to seed and apply Siduron. You can also wait for another flush of weeds, and kill them again non-selectively before seeding. Wait seven to 14 days to reseed after applying these non-selective herbicides.

With either approach, you should feel successful if your spring seeding program results in 70-percent turf and 30-percent weeds by the beginning of the fall schedule. Continue to add seed during your fall renovation program—it's the best time to establish grass with low weed competition.

Spring and early summer should not be considered your primary time to reestablish grass. Unfortunately, it is often the only time when there are no scheduled sporting events, and when you can finally get some work done. □

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