

“Controlling Wild Garlic in the Lawn”

Wild garlic is easily identified in the home lawn by its slender bright green leaves that rise above the turf. In bermudagrass and damaged tall fescue lawns, it is often the only thing that is green during this time of year. If you can't identify wild garlic by the look of the plant, you will almost certainly know it by the smell when you are mowing.

Although similar in appearance to and often mistaken for wild onion, wild garlic is far more prevalent in Tennessee. It grows in clumps of several individual plants and has leaves that are hollow and have a waxy appearance. By contrast, the leaves of wild onion are flat and not hollow. Wild garlic infestations are most prevalent during fall, winter and early spring.

Wild garlic is a cool-season perennial that emerges from bulbs in the fall and grows throughout the winter. It will flower and produce aerial bulblets that can survive for several years after they are incorporated into the soil profile. After these bulblets are formed in the spring, the plant will senesce and remain dormant throughout the warm summer months.

While regular mowing will not control wild garlic, it can reduce plant vigor and hamper bulb production. Pulling is another option if you only have a small number of weeds. This is difficult as it is hard to get all the bulbs and any left behind will re-emerge later. For best results dig them out with a thin trowel when the soil is somewhat moist.

Chemical control is possible but plan on spraying more than once and for multiple years for heavy infestations. A single plant usually has several bulblets that will sprout and grow at different times over multiple years. Furthermore, the thin, glossy leaves limit an herbicide's ability to stick to the plant. Research has shown that mowing wild garlic immediately before applying an herbicide may improve uptake. Do not mow for at least two weeks after spraying to allow the herbicide to completely kill the plant.

Several herbicides are available to control wild garlic in turfgrasses. Probably the most commonly used herbicide is 2,4-D, or 2-way and 3-way herbicides that contain 2,4-D. Herbicide applications should be made in the fall after re-growth of wild garlic has occurred following the first hard frost. However, early-spring applications can also be effective. Optimum control can be achieved by repeating either fall/winter or early spring applications annually.

Always read the product label before applying an herbicide and follow use directions carefully. After any herbicide application, if sufficient re-growth of wild garlic occurs, a second application will aid in long-term control. Wild garlic is a difficult weed to eradicate but with patience and persistence it can be done. For more information, including specific herbicide recommendations, contact the University of Tennessee Extension office at 615-418-6472.