

North Carolina Sedge Family Branch Has 40 Species

Dear Plant Doctor: I am enclosing a sample of my problem weed, cock-o-bur, as we called them out West. They are spreading rapidly in my centipedegrass lawn. I was told to try Weed-be-Kill this spring but it has not done any good. Would appreciate any help you can give me. Enjoy your column. Thanks.

ANSWER: The weed you sent me is commonly known "Out East" as nutsedge or nutgrass (*Cyperus esculentus*). Nutsedge is a member of the sedge family, and in North Carolina this sedge family branch contains over 40 species. Many species of sedge can be weedy invaders of the home lawn.

The sedges are distinctly different from grasses and other broadleaf plants. Sedges can be easily identified by their triangular stem. I know of no other plant species with this characteristic. Most species of sedge prefer acid moist soils but many can easily adapt to sandy drought-prone soils without difficulty. Because sedges are so different from other plants, few herbicides are effective killing them.

Several methods are available for control of weedy sedges in turfgrass:

- Sedges can be controlled in the lawn by constant hand removal.

- Turkeys, hogs and deer are especially fond of the starchy tuber or "nut" around the base of nutsedge. Animals will "root out" nearly every sprig of nutsedge in your lawn but in the process leave very little grass.

- Chufa is the name for the cultivated type of nutsedge many hunt clubs and nature buffs plant to attract wildlife.

- For most lawn grasses, the herbicides bentazon (Basagran) or imazaquin (Image) will kill many (but not all) species of sedge. Basagran will kill all species of nutsedge except purple nutsedge. Image is effective on all species of sedge. In bermudagrass or zoysiagrass, MSMA or similar arsenical herbicides can be effectively used for sedge control.

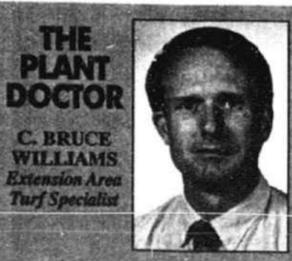
Nutsedge and its relatives are extremely difficult to control and, once established, routine treatment will be required for several years to effectively remove the weed with any of the herbicides.

Dear Plant Doctor: We have a problem with our grass disappearing in large sections. What is left are holes in the ground about 0.25 inches in diameter and hundreds of small tunnels. These tunnels occur just under the surface and cause the soil to become very soft. The problem is spreading fast. What could cause this and what can we do to stop it?

ANSWER: Sounds like the tawny mole cricket (*Scantersicus vicinus*). Entomologists throughout the southeastern United States agree the tawny mole cricket is quickly becoming the number-one insect pest of warm-season grass lawns. A native to South America, the tawny mole cricket has been a serious pest of grasses and other crops in Florida for nearly 75 years. Experts estimate this single insect pest is costing Florida home owners and turfgrass managers 60 to 70 million dollars annually.

For some unknown reason, the tawny mole cricket started a northern campaign during the 1980s and was first identified as a major pest species in Brunswick county in 1987. Two other species of mole cricket occur in North Carolina but neither is destructive as the tawny mole cricket. Damage to turfgrass from the tawny mole cricket is most evident during warm autumn and spring days immediately following a rain. Moist soil and warm weather are conducive to creating a feeding frenzy in these insects.

North Carolina State University and Cornell University are presently involved in a joint three year re-



THE PLANT DOCTOR
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of the tawny mole cricket. The major thrust of this cooperative research effort is being conducted in Brunswick, New Hanover, and Fender counties.

Killing mature mole crickets in the autumn or spring is essentially futile. Maximum doses and multiple treatments of insecticides are required to kill mature mole crickets.

The best time to control severe infestations of this pest is immediately after egg hatch in July and again in August. The young nymphs are very susceptible to a wide range of insecticides. For controlling mole crickets in home lawns, the following insecticides are labeled for mole cricket control: Pageant, Dursban, Oftanol, Orthene, Tempo, Triumph, Turcam, Diazinon, Baygon or Sevin bait. Commercial applicators have a new strain parasitic nematode that will only attack mole crickets. Soil treatment with this insect parasite gives acceptable control in some situations.

I am sending you a publication that Dr. R.L. Brandenburg and I wrote titled "A Complete Guide to Mole Cricket Management in North Carolina". Good luck!

Dear Plant Doctor: I treated for

fire ants this spring and during the summer had very few ant hills on my property. However this fall, fire ants hills are everywhere. How do I get rid of this pest once and for all? Is there any pesticide that will permanently kill these horrible insects?

ANSWER: Fire ants are with us, and I doubt any pesticide will be available in the future that will kill fire ants permanently. Fire ant control is like roach control; it must be performed routinely to get good results. Now is a good time to treat fire ants.

Best control usually results in

spring and fall when temperatures are between 70 and 85 degrees. Mound drenches or baits are suitable for most home lawns. Dr. Charles Apperson (N.C. State University) has recently published an excellent leaflet that details the optimum treatment methods for red imported fire ant in North Carolina. You can obtain this publication, "Control of the Red Imported Fire Ant-AG486," free of charge at any county office of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service.

Send your gardening questions or comments to the Plant Doctor, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia NC 28422.

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