Crabgrass

by

*Eyes Right*

**Springfield, VA –** I do not desire a “show” lawn, so when occasional clumps of crabgrass (botanical name, digitaria) appear, I usually shrug. So long as my lawn is green and filled-in, I am happy. If crabgrass or a pesky weed does begin to become a problem, I either dig the intruders out by hand, or spray some weed/crabgrass killer on the area.

But I also have a steep side yard which is not suitable for mowing. For the past several years I have had flowers, trees, and shrubs in this area. In the spring there are at least 500 daffodil blooms; it looks great. The problem begins when I leave Virginia in late May or early June to summer at our camp in Maine. Crabgrass seeds from the previous year apparently immediately sense my departure, germinate, and start a vigorous growth cycle. By the time I return in October, the crabgrass will be over 2 feet high with dried seeds looking like a Midwest wheat field. I know that my neighbor to the east is not happy about this eyesore and seed factory because it always her first comment to me upon my return.

So, I have decided to go to war with digitaria. My first salvo was fertilizer containing weed and crab grass preventer. Unfortunately, I learned by late spring that many of the crabgrass seeds had not read the advertising copy on the fertilizer bag and were happily germinating with green shoots poking through the ground. Chemical warfare was obviously an insufficient attack.

I began saving newspapers and cardboard. The plan was to smother those suckers. I did not want friendly fire to kill all those daffodils, so I spent two days digging out the bulbs. They are now in four large grocery bags in my basement waiting for me to plant them in the fall. By digging them out, I sacrificed bulb reproduction during the summer, but this was war. The next step was to spray a thick coating of glyphosate (a.k.a., Roundup) on every remaining living plant. During much of the next three days

I carefully laid down as much paper product as possible on the ground attempting to cover every square inch.

The final part of my plan involved mulch – lots of mulch. One perk here in our county is free mulch at the landfill. I simply take my pickup truck there, position the bed under a chute, and push a button. A conveyor belt begins to deliver mulch directly into the truck bed. When I returned home, I had to unload all this mulch by hand on top of the paper. I quickly learned that I needed far more mulch, but the local garden stores had bags on sale, so I bought 20 bags. Now most of the target area is smothered in 4 inches of mulch on top of the paper products.

I carefully wrapped paper around the trunk of the trees, but the azalea bushes proved to be more of a challenge. I worry that digitaria infantry will be massing around anyplace that I left an opening with the paper products and will zoom straight up through the mulch. I have had a dream about this.

I promise to report back on the outcome of this war. I am outnumbered (one crabgrass plant can produce 150,000 seeds in one summer!), and I will be far away while digitaria attempts to overrun, outflank, and generally outlast me, but it needs to understand that this is not my first grass rodeo. I spent many a summer on our Kentucky farm battling Johnson grass (considered one of the ten worst weeds in the world), making crabgrass seem far less of a challenge. Stay tuned….and place your bets.

I thought you might like to know.

E-R