

## Introduction

When you see a picture of a lush green lawn with not a weed in sight, you can't help but admire it. A lot of gardeners aspire to having the perfect lawn but the reality can be a lot different.

A few weeds are no great problem but when left alone for too long, they can quickly multiply into an unsightly mess. To control lawn weeds you need to utilise a combination of cultural and chemical controls.

## Weed species

Weeds in a lawn are usually perennials i.e. once they get established they remain year after year with some having the ability to spread widely. For example, a single daisy can develop into a large patch over a few seasons. Weeds you will commonly find in your lawn are daisies, dandelions, ragwort, clover, buttercup, plantains, speedwell and moss.



**Daisy:** Familiar to all, the flowers appear from April to June with a flush in May. The flower heads close up at night and open during the day – hence the original name, day's eye. It's an evergreen perennial whose leaves form a rosette. Short prostrate shoots develop from some of the leaf axils to form a daisy patch, that will increase in size year on year. It also propagates itself readily from seed.



**Dandelion:** This one needs no introduction with its instantly recognisable bright yellow flowers. It's an adaptable weed in a lawn situation being able to hug the ground with its leaves and the low set flowers steering clear of mower blades. The airborne seeds blow all over the place and only need the slightest of gaps in a lawn to germinate and establish.

## Moss

Due to our damp climate moss is a very common constituent of lawns. Although it tends to be worse on heavy damp soils and in shaded areas it can crop up anywhere, particularly on neglected lawns. Moss growth usually peaks in the early spring so March or April is a good time of the year to treat it.

Sulphate of iron effectively controls moss and it's normally sold in combination with a lawn feed and additional herbicides to give a complete 'weed and feed' product. Sulphate of iron can also be applied on its own by diluting the powder in warm water and applying in a watering can with a fine rose or in a sprayer with a coarse nozzle. The rate is 5 g/m<sup>2</sup>. The iron will rapidly blacken the moss which can then be left for a week or two before raking out. Any blackening of grass is temporary. Apply a lawn feed after application to encourage the grass to thicken. However moss will always tend to grow back, hence the need to treat it on a regular basis.

## Cultural control

Weak and thin grass due to poor nutrition can be a factor in allowing weeds to gain a foothold in lawns. If you follow a regular feeding programme and build up a thick sward you are less likely to be troubled by weeds. Also keep an eye on your pH levels – aim for a figure of around 6 to 6.5 for good growth of grass. If there are only small numbers of weeds in the lawn they can be cut out with a knife.

## Chemical control

If you have a lot of weeds the best way to deal with them is to use a lawn herbicide which kills broadleaved plants without harming grasses. There is a wide range available in both liquid and granular form and several also contain a lawn feed. They are usually composed of a mixture of chemicals in order to kill a wide range of weeds. One can either treat the whole lawn or with smaller areas, spot spray using a handheld trigger sprayer.



**Plantain:** There are two species of plantain commonly found growing in grassland areas – the broadleaved and the narrow leaved (Ribwort plantain). The broad leaved type is very tolerant of trampling. Plantains are well controlled by any of the herbicides mentioned overleaf.

## Lawn Sand

Lawn sand is an old traditional remedy for weeding and feeding a lawn. It's a mix of 20 parts sand, 3 parts sulphate of ammonia and 1 part sulphate of iron applied at 100-130 g/m<sup>2</sup>. At best it will only suppress broadleaved weeds but is more effective on moss and gives grass growth a boost.

## Awkward weeds

As you will discover some weed species are easier to kill than others. Clover, daisies and silverweed often require two applications of a herbicide about a month apart for complete control. Yarrow is a deep rooted perennial that can be difficult to control with herbicides so hit it hard before it gets a chance to establish itself. It's easy enough to kill back the top-growth of dandelions but if they are well established they can regrow – suggest a follow-up spray in August after a spring application. Helxine or 'mind your own business' is resistant to all herbicides bar those based on triclopyr – spray with SBK Brushwood Killer at 20 ml/10 m<sup>2</sup>. Full details on Helxine control are available on the Teagasc website under 'Publications'



**Slender Speedwell:** Originally introduced as an alpine ornamental it escaped out into the lawn and has enjoyed life there ever since. It's unusual in that it can only propagate itself vegetatively, so can spread from lawn clippings left on the grass. Once established it can be awkward to eradicate as it's moderately resistant to a lot of lawn herbicides – suggest using several applications of fluroxypyr.

# Lawn Weed Control

## Grass weeds

Yorkshire Fog is an example of a grass that looks unattractive in a lawn and could be termed a weed. It's unaffected by the standard lawn weedkillers but if it's a large patch it could be killed out with a glyphosate containing product e.g. Roundup and the area reseeded. Alternatively if you slash the patch with a sharp knife it will weaken the grass. Repeat the process as often as required. If scutch comes up through a newly laid lawn it will normally disappear with regular mowing.



*Yorkshire Fog: This a broadleaved grass that can look unattractive growing amongst fine leaved lawn grass species. Greenkeepers will keep it under control by using a scarifier. A sharp knife can substitute for a scarifier.*



*White Clover: There are several different types of trifoliate (3 leaved) lawn weeds – white and yellow clover are the two commonest. Clover spreads itself vegetatively with low growing stems that root at the nodes and also seeds freely. Dicamba and mecoprop are both effective against white clover but it may take two applications. Yellow clover is moderately resistant to the aforementioned but is susceptible to fluroxypyr which is also good against the other trefoils. If you wish to keep clover in your lawn (it fixes nitrogen) but hit other weeds, then use straight MCPA.*

## New lawns

Very often you will get a lot of annual weeds germinating along with your grass seed after sowing a lawn. However the bulk of these will disappear once you start to cut the grass. Depending on the season the first cut is approximately 6 weeks after sowing. Leave at least three months before treating newly sown lawns with herbicide.

## Safety

Keep all pesticides well out of the way of children and preferably locked away. Always wear rubber gloves when handling the concentrate and wellington boots when spraying. Do not use kitchen utensils to measure out herbicides. Choose your spraying day carefully to ensure fine, calm weather conditions. Keep children and pets away from the treated area until the spray has dried. Wash your hands and face immediately after spraying.

## Helpful hints

- spray from April to September, avoiding very cold or dry spells
- allow 5-7 days after and before cutting to enable sufficient top growth for adequate uptake
- need a minimum of 3 hours drying after application
- evening is a good time to spray especially if the day is hot
- measure the area to be sprayed and mark it out with canes or string into 2m wide strips
- apply with a sprayer or use a watering can with a fine rose
- amount of water used is not critical – suggest 0.5-1 litre per 10 m<sup>2</sup> for a sprayer or 3-5 litres for a watering can
- if applying a granular material by hand apply half the recommended dose in one direction and the other half at right angles to it
- compost treated lawn clippings for 3 months before use

Product	Chemical	Rate per 10m <sup>2</sup>	Price €	Size	Cost per m <sup>2</sup> (c)
Weedol Lawn Weedkiller	MCPA, clopyralid, fluroxypyr	15 ml	17	500 ml	5.1c
Dichophar Lawn Weedkiller	MCPA, MCPP, dicamba	7.5 ml	25	1 L	1.9c
Greenforce Lawn Weedkiller	dicamba, mecoprop	10 ml	22	1 L	2.2c
Resolva Lawn Weedkiller	dicamba, mecoprop	20 ml	17	500 ml	6.8c
Sulphate of iron	ferrous sulphate	50 g	8	1.5 kg	2.6c

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