Late Winter-Spring Weed Control
Using Pre-Emergent Herbicides
By David Hooten

When does Spring weed control begin?
Typically for Lea County, New Mexico we need to start applying herbicides from late January through the end of March to control various broadleaf and wild grass seeds carried into our lawns and landscapes by the winds. These are the prime months for spring and summer types of weeds begin to germinate in the lawn and rocked landscapes.

Are there some important issues to consider for weed control?
Yes, by all means the gardener must understand what his or her target weeds are: dandelions, oxalis, tumble weeds, grass burrs, puncture vine, rescue grass, etc. Broadleaf weeds and grasses are different and they get lumped together under a general term of weeds. They require different herbicide applications and products vary. For this article I am going to talk about Pre-Emergent herbicides only. Timing the control measures is extremely important. You do not control grass burrs in late December or January, there is no green plant to kill. Seeds (stickers) are the next generation and proper timing for the months of germination is essential for control. Chemical product life in the soil very important and how residual it is over the germination window for targeted plants.

What is a Pre-Emergent?
A pre-emergent herbicide is a weed killer applied prior to the emergence of the broadleaf and grass seedlings from the soil. The chemical attacks the infantile seedling.

Is Pre-Emergent herbicides short term or long lasting in Lea County’s soil for weed control?
There are many types of Pre-Emergent chemical on the market. Some are very short term, lasting only 30 days and then gone. Other Pre-Emergent products will last for 3 months to 6 months of seedling control. Let me reiterate here, a pre-emergent herbicide attacks a seedling plant only. If there are weeds present prior to the pre-emergent being applied these weeds will live and thrive to be a menace in the lawn later. You will have to pull these out manually or spray a contact weed spray to kill them.

Can you describe some the Pre-Emergent products available?
Balan was the first to be on the homeowner’s market list. Balan last in Lea County’s soil less than 30-days. Balan applied in January would be gone from your soil by mid-February. You would have March into April with NO weed control measures. You will be in the prime months of weed seed germination for Lea County.

As I stated earlier, “TIMING” your pre-emergent herbicide application is CRITICAL!
There are products such as **Surflan, Dacthal, Pendimethalin (Scott’s Halt), Dithopyr (Demension)** they are pre-emergents that last from 3 to 6 months in the soil surface. These chemical products will give a wider window in controlling weeds and grasses. What are your TARGET weeds and know your TIMING for applications. **Read…Read the herbicide label and understand what you are doing.**

There is one organic pre-emergent, it is **corn gluten meal.** It has been used on Lea County lawns and has been successful in controlling broad leafs, some wild grasses. In a few yards where used the grass burrs were controlled. This product is an organic alternative to the use of chemicals for some.

What’s the blue and green chemicals being applied to lawns and barren soil areas in Lea County?

These are generally the commercial pesticide applicators utilizing a blue or green sun-fast dye that marks the areas where they have applied a chemical herbicide. The tracer dye is available to homeowners who spray their own lawns. As for the herbicide chemicals being applied they can be a straight application of a pre-emergent or a cock-tail mix with another contact weed killer to knock out the weeds that the pre-emergent herbicide will not touch for a dual control.

Can Pre-Emergents be used in all areas of the landscape?

**No, they cannot!** Use of a pre-emergent herbicide in your vegetable garden will kill your vegetable seedlings coming up. The same goes for using the product in flower beds where you are sowing flower seeds or having seeds from last year come up from self-seeding plants. Pre-emergents should not be used in lawns where you plan to sow bermuda, fescue or blue grass seeds for turf repairs to the lawn.

Pre-Emergents are great for use in perennial beds, rose beds, shrub beds and well established lawns. These are areas you are not sowing any kind of seeds. These products will help in the long-run by not pulling weeds by hand or having to spray them. They are maintenance and labor saving products to use.

Using Pre-emergents will give you a great head start on the weeds and provide an advantage to the turf and landscaped areas so you can spend more time enjoying them.