

## **What Can I Do About Those Weedy Seed Heads in My Lawn?**



**Here is how it starts**



**Here is a minor infestation**

Annual bluegrass, *Poa annua*, is a problem in our lawns. First the scattered seed heads rise up or are buried in the lawn grasses. Then patches of lighter green grass scattered throughout the lawn appear, soon spreading until the annual bluegrass takes over.





### **This is how it ends**

Annual bluegrass is the annual variety of the perennial bluegrass used in lawns. That is what makes it so difficult to control; it's a grass very similar to the lawn grasses used in the Pacific Northwest, so chemicals that kill it are going to kill the desirable grasses as well.

The newest twist to the story is that annual bluegrass has morphed into a perennial variety in our climate. The perennial variety hides better in lawns, but still sends up the ugly seed heads and spreads just as fast.

Annual bluegrass is a cool season grass, but in our climate it grows and seeds year-round, although a really cold winter may slow it down. Once it goes to seed, the seeds can survive for several years in the soil, just waiting for the right conditions to germinate and grow into the lawn-disturbing patches we hate. The root system is very shallow and weak; it pulls right up and dies out when lawns go dry. But the seeds are

just waiting for cooler temperatures and some moisture to germinate and grow new plants.

There is no way to avoid the seeds getting into lawns. They will be blown in by wind, pets and those cute bunnies we see in the neighborhood will track them into your yard, and if you have a lawn service the mowers will bring them in and spread them efficiently.

**Annual Bluegrass Control** - the first approach is to maintain a healthy lawn. See the section on lawn weeds for tips. It is important to allow the lawn to dry out before watering it again. Annual bluegrass has shallow roots and has a harder time getting established if the lawn is allowed to dry a bit. Properly fertilized lawn grasses watered two or three times a week will grow deeper roots to handle less frequent watering and may be more apt to out-compete the annual bluegrass.

But even if properly fertilized and watered, lawns will have some annual bluegrass. Hand pulling the clumps can help, and some gardeners use glyphosate, trade name 'Roundup,' spot sprayed or applied with a sponge to kill the annual bluegrass. Glyphosate will kill the desirable grasses that it touches, as well, and will leave a hole in the lawn that will have to be patched with topsoil. Read the label and follow the label directions for time required before reseeding. These control measures are best done in spring and fall. To get the reseeded areas to establish in hot mid summer weather can be difficult and requires careful mulching and watering several times a day. Use of glyphosate may be the only solution for patches of the perennial variety of annual bluegrass.

Since most of the spread of annual bluegrass is by seed, homeowners may want to consider using a lawn pre-emergent herbicide (do not use Preen pre-emergent on lawns). There are several products available and homeowners should consult with a knowledgeable nursery person, farm store or gardener when choosing a product. Be careful to follow label directions and check to see if the product is labeled for use with the local cool-season grasses because some products are specific for warm weather grass species.

Manufacturers of lawn pre-emergents recommend applying them in late August and through September in our climate, which can complicate lawn reseeding and overseeding. Reseeding and overseeding is usually done in fall, and reseeding and overseeding has to be timed to allow the new grass to be mowed several times before applying the pre-emergent, or homeowners will need to wait several months to reseed

or overseed following the application (check the label for specific details, each chemical is different).