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HOW TO GET RID OF QUACK GRASS

Not all grasses are created equal...
There's one in particular that nobody wants to find taking up residence in their lawn...

Quackgrass

(Also known as couch grass, twitch, quick grass, quitch grass, dog grass, scutch grass and witchgrass)



IDENTIFYING QUACKGRASS

Quackgrass should actually be called an invasive weed. Make no mistake about it, it is NOT a type of lawn grass. It's an opportunistic weed that thrives where lawn grass is either weak and struggling or non-existent. Unfortunately, quackgrass is one of the hardest weeds to get rid of in your lawn.

It somewhat resembles fescue, ryegrass and crabgrass. However, it's not to be confused with crabgrass which is another potential unwanted usurper of your turf ---

Quackgrass is NOT the same as Crabgrass

Mis-identification can lead to using wrong treatment methods which can be a waste of time and money. Whereas crabgrass is a warm-season annual grass, quackgrass is a cool-season perennial grass found primarily in northern latitudes. Crabgrass roots will form a shallow crab-like structure and tend to stay in a bunch while a quackgrass root system forms pronounced white/tan rhizomes that grow horizontally as well as deep within the soil. Digging up the plant, as such, is an easy way to differentiate between crabgrass and quackgrass. Crabgrass will be easier to pull out, roots and all.

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Whereas it's just the opposite with trying to entirely remove a quackgrass plant. It should also be noted that whereas there are, indeed, some choices of selective herbicides for killing crabgrass, only non-selective ones may work on quackgrass with some cautions as to the use of such non-selective herbicides in lawns [more about that later].

Quackgrass is a formidable cold-hardy foe that if left unaddressed can quickly take over a lawn. It's an understatement to say it's tough to get rid of. It requires persistence and regular inspection to make sure it doesn't make a re-appearance once you've attempted to get rid of it.

It's fairly easy to identify it ---Walk around your yard and observe where any quackgrass is growing. You'll want to catch these plants early... The more mature the plants are the more difficult they will be to totally eradicate...

Quackgrass is known to grow rapidly in very little time and can potentially take over an entire lawn, standing out like a sore thumb.

So, if you notice clumps of quick-sprouting grass that are taller than the rest of your turf, with leaves that are broader than normal lawn type grasses and the grass blades also have a rough, almost burr-like feel to them, it's apt to be quackgrass. Quackgrass has long tapered blades that are thicker than the average blade of grass and attached to a hollow stem. The stems will have a little collar wrapped around them where the leaf connects... these are called auricles. Their seed heads look similar to those of wheat or ryegrass.

Quackgrass uses rhizomes, or underground runners, to spread out its root system. Their rhizomes can spread up to 5 feet in a single growing season, extending 6 to 10 feet or more from the mother plant, and can grow 6 to 8 feet deep below the surface. They can give rise to new plants every few inches or more. These rhizomes also produce chemicals that can stunt the growth of other plants so that the quackgrass can potentially out-compete them and take their place. This chemical production, known as allelopathy, is the weed's "superpower," you might say. This is why you'll usually see quackgrass standing out higher and more prominently than surrounding grasses.

Quackgrass roots will be thick and white. If it's pulled out of the ground, you may notice that the roots break easily and often pieces of the roots will stay in the soil after the plant is removed, and will easily split off into separate plants, which is not a good thing. Its underground root rhizome system makes it, therefore, difficult to totally get rid of.

Quackgrass may quickly choke your turfgrass, but it's not something that will cause skin irritations or pose other risks to humans or pets. In fact, quackgrass will attract animals or small birds such as sparrows, who feast on the seeds. Often these birds lose the seeds in your lawn, causing the weed to grow. Unfortunately, animals also tend to spread the seeds on your lawn via their droppings, thus potentially spreading to larger areas.

Each quackgrass plant produces about 25 seeds, typically starting in early summer, and they can stay viable in the soil for 3 to 5 years before germinating. In other words, if you don't take action, you could be battling this plant for many years to come.

Though not applicable for the average residential lawn owner, it should be noted that straw bales often contain quackgrass seeds that can get into your lawn. So be careful as to where you're placing any bales, or utilizing the straw from the bales in your gardens, etc.

HOW TO KILL QUACKGRASS

Needless to say quackgrass that is appearing here or there in a garden or on the edges of a lawn may not be quite as difficult to get rid of as compared to it growing and already spread-out in the middle of your lawn.

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“Manual pulling” is really your only non-chemical option for getting rid of quackgrass. That can sometimes take care of your issue when the plant is young. However, because quackgrass tends to somewhat disintegrate and spread when you dig it up, it’s essential to be careful when doing so. Though obviously not pertaining to lawns, you should never use a rototiller on quackgrass; you’ll only break up the quackgrass rhizomes and end up spreading the seed all over the yard.

Yes, there are some DIY solutions that some people have had limited success with, but again, those aren’t going to help you much when you have quackgrass in the midst of your lawn. In fact, most of those would harm your lawn, too, so those really aren’t feasible options that we’ll discuss in this article.

Likewise, though you can’t do this in the middle of your lawn, some people have had good success in their garden beds by smothering the quackgrass with mulch.

They lay down landscape fabric or black plastic and add a 2-3 inch layer of wood chips which can help prevent quackgrass from popping up in your garden beds. However, the rhizomes of quackgrass may continue to creep along underground until they finally find a spot where they can send up a new shoot. It’s a very insidious and voracious weed.

Unfortunately, killing quackgrass is not as easy as simply spraying a herbicide. There really is no magic selective-quackgrass-specific “spray this once and your problem will be forever gone” solution. Plus, though there may be commercial post-emergent herbicides with various procedures required for their application, which may offer some degree of success for golf courses and whatnot, scaled-down spray products specifically for quackgrass for residential lawn use are just not available, nor are some of those herbicides allowed for sale within Canada.

Firstly, let it be said, too, that chemical control should only be used as a last resort, as organic approaches are more environmentally friendly. But of course, how severe your quackgrass infestation may be may have some bearing on the approach you take to eradicating it.

Given that quackgrass resembles other common types of turfgrass, applying a non-selective glyphosate-based herbicide is really all that will work effectively. An example of this would be Roundup Weed & Grass Killer. With typically 2 or 3 applications, it will kill it but be forewarned - as the product name indicates, it will also kill any other vegetation it comes in contact with, so be careful not to get it on the grass or any other nearby desirable plants. So as such, spot-spraying the weed can be a challenge especially when it’s in the midst of your lawn. If you’re going to spot-spray, experiment carefully first and be as precise as you can without also spraying your lawn as it will surely kill it faster than even before it may reach down to the quackgrass rhizomes. And... do it early in the season to help keep the weed from going to seed, and spreading everywhere.

There’s an old saying in the lawn care business that essentially says, “The very best herbicide of all is a dense stand of vigorously growing healthy and thick turfgrass.” Just remember that weeds don’t like competition and tend to primarily infest weaker, thinner, less healthy or struggling lawns. This is the best preventive defense for quackgrass, or any weeds for that matter.

If an area of your lawn or garden becomes badly infested, you may need to treat it/remove it and then re-seed/replant the entire area.

However, if you do decide to tackle your quackgrass with a herbicide, follow these steps. (Of course, this isn’t recommended for a serious quackgrass infestation within a lawn for obvious reasons) ---

1. Before you spray, remove any plants that you want to protect from the immediate area, if possible, as the non-selective herbicide will otherwise likely kill them, too.
2. Pull up as much quackgrass as you can, being careful not to spread seeds by bagging the weeds in paper or plastic to dispose of them, or burn them in your firepit.
3. Check the soil carefully for any traces of the quackgrass rhizome root system and remove those roots.

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4. Treat the affected area with a non-selective herbicide...
5. Wait a week, then treat the soil again as it's likely to take more than one application, and so on...
6. Allow any quackgrass left to die, then remove all remnants of it and reseed/replant the area.

QUACKGRASS CONTROL

A word of caution --- Don't think that once you've attempted to merely pull out every last vestige of the quackgrass that it's thereafter gone forever. You may not have reached every bit of its underground rhizomes unfortunately. You'll still need to be vigilant to keep this persistent weed away.

Here are some further steps to keep your lawn quackgrass-free for good:

- **PREVENTION IS THE BEST DEFENSE... A HEALTHY LAWN IS ALWAYS THE BEST DETERRANT** --- It is especially important to promote deep roots in your turf with proper watering habits, since this is a leading defense against the impact of summer drought. And it's during drought times that openings may be created in your turf where quackgrass and other weeds can thrive.
- Essentially, what you put into maintaining your lawn and utilizing best lawn care management practices will be the measure of what you get out of your lawn. So, ensure that your lawn is thick and healthy enough to ward off any potential invasion. Lawns left on their own without much being done for routine lawn maintenance are typically those lawns that are struggling and more susceptible to weeds and various other issues or possible fungal diseases, etc.
- Remember that weeds do not like competition --- Overseed to thicken thinner lawns. Give it lots of care to ensure it has every opportunity for growth. Water your grass as needed.... less frequently but when you do water, don't be afraid to put down more... And mow it regularly.
- Also, be sure to periodically apply a nitrogen fertilizer like what we offer via our 4-Spray Fertilizer & Weed Control program. This will enable your lawn to grow strong and lush and likely out-compete and choke out any quackgrass and other weeds.
- On an ongoing basis inspect your lawn throughout the growing season to ensure quackgrass has not returned, especially in loamy or sandy soils where the weed thrives.
- Also, be sure to check any other plants you may have brought home from stores or nurseries so you don't accidentally re-introduce quackgrass that happened to be hiding in them. Remove the quackgrass and its roots completely if you discover it in any pot or planter.
- If you do spot a resurgence in your yard, act quickly to limit the spread by following the above measures mentioned in this article.

Yes, we also wish there was a "do this one-time" magic solution for quackgrass but unfortunately it doesn't exist. However, if you heed the above advice wherever it applies and works for you, then you should get some success in eliminating or at least controlling any widespread quackgrass.

If you have any other questions about your lawn or may require any lawn care services, don't hesitate to give us a call.

***** SPECIAL NOTE *****

We love helping our clients have great-looking lawns! Of course, we always welcome your inquiries, but we also want to help educate you, too. So many of you have told us how much you appreciate the articles we make available to you.

If there are any questions you may have about your lawn or any challenges or problems you may occasionally encounter with your lawn, don't hesitate to give us a call. As with the above info article you've just read, we also have other highly beneficial lawn care articles, too...

Here are some we've created to support you with your lawn care efforts. They can help you identify any problems as well as offer some possible solutions for some of those occasional challenges lawns can encounter.

These info articles are not meant to be one-time definitive cures for whatever might ail your lawn. We all wish it was only that simple... But, there are no magic "spray this once and your lawn will be perfect thereafter" solutions... Unfortunately, those don't really exist, as much as we might all like them to. However, there are many things you can do to get your lawn in great shape and keep it that way. We encourage you to glean what you can from any of the following articles that may interest you. And for what you're not sure about, give us a call, let's talk about it, and we'll do what we can to help you.

You may reach us at 780-678-6450 if you'd like to receive any of these via email. It would be our pleasure to do our part to help you "make your lawn the envy of your neighbours"...

From Our "**PROACTIVE LAWN CARE**" Series Of Articles —

7 Steps To A Great Lawn

Caring For Our Lawn Over The Winter

Proactively Preparing Your Lawn For Drought Conditions

From Our "**WHAT YOU'RE NOT TOLD**" Series Of Articles —

What You're Not Told About All-Natural & Organic Lawn Care Alternatives

What You're Not Told About Bats & Their Guano

From Our "**WHY?**" Series Of Articles —

Why Is My Grass So Thin?

Why Dead Spots On My Lawn?

Why Am I Getting Mushrooms In My Lawn?

Why Are The Pine Needles Killing My Grass?

From Our "**HOW TO GET RID OF...**" Series Of Articles —

How To Get Rid of Ants

How To Get Rid of Dew Worms

How To Get Rid of Fairy Rings

How To Get Rid of Quackgrass

How To Get Rid of Thistles

From Our "**DAMAGE BY DOGS & OTHER CRITTERS**" Series of Articles —

Fixing & Preventing Dog Spots

Damage Caused by Voles

...See more on next page...

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From Our **“SEEDING LAWNS”** Series Of Articles —

Grass Seeding For New Lawns
Overseeding For Existing Lawns

From Our **“DIY”** Series Of Articles —

DIY_Alternate Ways To Remove Weeds In Gravel Areas

From Our **“COMMON LAWN FUNGAL DISEASES”** Series Of Articles —

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases (Compendium Of All Common Ones)
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_The Usual Causes
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Snow Mold
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Leaf Spot & Melting Out
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Ascochyta Turf Leaf Blight
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Brown Patch
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Summer Patch
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Pythium Blight
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Red Thread
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Rust Diseases
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Powdery Mildew
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Dollar Spot
Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Fairy Ring

INFORMATION ON OUR FIVE PRIMARY LAWN CARE SERVICES —

FERTILIZER & WEED CONTROL:

Our Fertilization & Weed Control Program
Possible Reasons For Still Having Weeds
Ten Reasons Our Program is Different

ENRICH SOIL ENHANCER:

Our Enrich Soil Enhancer Program
Different Soil Types Have Different pH Levels

WEEKLY MOWING:

How The Weekly Lawn Mowing Works
Our Quality Control Program
Ten Reasons We Are Different

CORE AERATION:

Why Aerate Your Lawn?

POWER RAKING:

Why Power-Rake Your Lawn?

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