



Controlling Lawn Weeds

General Principles for controlling lawn weeds on the Gold Coast:

Controlling lawn weeds on the Gold Coast, Queensland, is an ongoing battle, but with the right strategies, you can keep your turf looking its best. The warm, humid climate encourages vigorous weed growth, so a proactive and integrated approach is essential.

I. Prevention: The First Line of Defence

This is the most crucial step in the Gold Coast climate.

1. **Healthy, Dense Lawn:** A thick, vigorous lawn crowds out weeds by denying them sunlight and space.
 - **Right Turf:** Choose a grass variety well-suited to your conditions (sun, shade, traffic) that forms a dense canopy. Popular choices like Sir Walter Buffalo, Empire Zoysia, and Nara Native Zoysia are known for their weed-resistant qualities due to their dense growth habits.
 - **Proper Mowing:** Mow at the recommended height for your grass type (generally higher is better to shade out weed seeds) and with sharp blades. Never remove more than one-third of the blade at a time.
 - **Correct Watering:** Water deeply and infrequently (e.g., once or twice a week in dry periods) in the early morning. This encourages deep root growth and allows grass blades to dry, discouraging fungal diseases that favour weeds.
 - **Balanced Fertilisation:** Use a slow-release fertiliser designed for your turf type. Healthy turf can outcompete weeds. Avoid over-fertilising, especially with nitrogen, as it can sometimes encourage weeds or make grass too lush and susceptible.
 - **Aeration:** Periodically aerate your lawn to reduce soil compaction, improve drainage, and allow roots to access water and nutrients more effectively. This creates a stronger lawn less prone to weed invasion.
 - **Thatch Management:** Remove excessive thatch (the layer of dead organic matter above the soil) as it can harbour weed seeds and pests.
2. **Pre-Emergent Herbicides:** These are a game-changer for weed prevention.
 - **How they work:** They form a barrier in the soil that prevents weed seeds from germinating. They don't kill existing weeds.
 - **Timing:** Apply in late summer/early autumn (around February/March) for winter weeds like Bindii and Winter Grass. Apply in early spring (around September) for summer weeds like Crabgrass and Crowsfoot.
 - **Products:** Look for products containing active ingredients like **Oxyfluorfen** (e.g., in some Oxfert products) or **Prodiamine**.

- **Important:** Do not apply pre-emergents if you plan to sow new grass seed, as it will prevent the desired grass from germinating.

II. Identification and Targeted Control:

Once weeds appear, accurate identification is key to choosing the right control method.

1. Common Gold Coast Lawn Weeds:

- **Broadleaf Weeds (targeted by selective broadleaf herbicides):**
 - **Bindii (Jo-Jo, Spurweed):** Low-growing, carrot-like leaves, produces painful burrs in spring.
 - **Clover:** Three-lobed leaves, often with a white crescent.
 - **Dandelion:** Rosette of toothed leaves, distinctive yellow flowers turning into puffballs.
 - **Oxalis (Creeping Oxalis/Woodsorrel):** Clover-like leaves, often heart-shaped, tiny yellow or pink flowers. Spreads rapidly by underground bulbs and runners.
 - **Cudweed:** Rosette of grey-green, often woolly leaves, forms dense clumps.
 - **Capeweed:** Large, broad leaves, yellow daisy-like flowers.
 - **Plantain:** Broad, ribbed leaves, grows low to the ground.
- **Grassy Weeds (often require different herbicides or manual removal):**
 - **Paspalum:** Coarse, clumping grass with distinctive seed heads. Very tough to eradicate.
 - **Crowsfoot Grass:** Low-growing, hardy annual with finger-like seed heads. Thrives in warmer months.
 - **Crabgrass (Summer Grass/Digitaria):** Fast-growing annual, sends out shoots from the centre, often with purplish bases.
 - **Winter Grass (Poa annua):** Bright green, soft drooping leaves, produces white seed heads, grows prolifically in cooler months.
- **Sedges (require specific sedge herbicides or manual removal):**
 - **Nutgrass:** Bright green, shiny, strappy leaves on a triangular stem. Spreads aggressively by underground tubers ("nuts").
 - **Mullumbimby Couch:** Similar to Nutgrass, also a sedge, forms dense mats.

III. Control Methods:

1. Manual Removal (Best for small infestations, specific weeds, or organic approaches):

- **Hand Pulling:** Effective for most broadleaf weeds when young and soil is moist. Ensure you get the entire taproot (e.g., Dandelion) or runner system.
- **For Nutgrass and Mullumbimby Couch:** This is crucial. Don't just pull the tops – you **MUST** dig deep to remove all the underground tubers/nuts, as each one can sprout a new plant. This is laborious but highly effective for small patches.
- **Weeding Tools:** Various tools (e.g., stand-up weed pullers, crack weeders) can make manual removal easier.

2. Chemical Control (Herbicides):

- **ALWAYS READ THE LABEL:** This cannot be stressed enough. Follow mixing rates, application instructions, safety precautions, and turf suitability. Different grass types (especially Buffalo) can be sensitive to certain herbicides.
- **Selective Herbicides (for Broadleaf Weeds):** These kill broadleaf weeds without harming your lawn.

- **For Buffalo, Zoysia, and Kikuyu Lawns:** Look for products specifically labelled as safe for these varieties. Many common weed 'n' feed products are NOT suitable for Buffalo.
- **Recommended Active Ingredients (often combined):**
 - **MCPA:** Common, effective for many broadleaf weeds.
 - **Dicamba:** Good for stubborn weeds like Clover and some Oxalis.
 - **Bromoxynil:** Also effective for many broadleaf weeds.
 - **Clopyralid & Diflufenican:** Found in professional-grade products like **Bow & Arrow** (often considered a Gold Standard for broadleaf weeds in Buffalo/Zoysia/Couch, effective on Bindii, Clover, Oxalis, Plantain, Cudweed, Capeweed). **Starane Advanced** (contains fluroxypyr) is also effective for many broadleaf weeds and safe on most turf types.
- **Application:** Apply when weeds are actively growing. Avoid mowing for a few days before and after application to maximise absorption.
- **Selective Herbicides (for Grassy Weeds):** These are more challenging and specific.
 - **Paspalum/Couch/Crowsfoot:** Some products exist (e.g., often containing **DSMA** or **MSMA** for Paspalum, though these can be harsher and require careful application). Consult a local nursery or turf specialist. Sometimes, targeted non-selective spot treatment (see below) or manual removal is a safer option.
 - **Winter Grass:** Specific products like **Winter Grass Killer** (often containing **Propyzamide**) are effective. Pre-emergents are a better preventative for Winter Grass.
- **Selective Herbicides (for Sedges - Nutgrass/Mullumbimby Couch):**
 - These weeds require specific herbicides, as general broadleaf or grassy weed killers are ineffective.
 - **Active Ingredient:** Look for products containing **Halosulfuron-methyl** (e.g., SedgeHammer, Lawn Solutions Sedge Control).
 - **Application:** Apply when Nutgrass is actively growing (late Spring to Autumn in Gold Coast) and has at least 5cm of new leaf growth. Repeated applications are often necessary. A wetting agent can improve absorption.
- **Non-Selective Herbicides (e.g., Glyphosate):**
 - **Use with extreme caution:** These kill *all* green plants they contact, including your lawn.
 - **Application:** Only for spot treatment of very stubborn weeds in isolated areas, or for clearing an area before re-turfing. Use a paintbrush or wick applicator for precision to avoid drift onto desirable grass.

IV. Gold Coast Specific Calendar & Tips:

- **Autumn (March - May):**
 - Ideal time for **pre-emergent** application to control winter weeds (Bindii, Winter Grass) before they germinate.
 - Great time to apply broadleaf selective herbicides for existing winter weeds while they are actively growing but haven't gone to seed (Bindii).
 - Continue good mowing and watering practices.
- **Winter (June - August):**
 - Weed growth slows, but some winter annuals like Bindii are still present.
 - Continue spot spraying broadleaf weeds if they appear.
 - Lawn growth is slower, so mow less frequently. Keep blades slightly higher.
- **Spring (September - November):**
 - Time for **pre-emergent** application for summer weeds (Crabgrass, Crowsfoot, Paspalum).
 - Broadleaf weeds from winter will be going to seed – try to spray them before this happens.

- Nutgrass and Mullumbimby Couch will start to become active – this is a good time to treat them with specific sedge herbicides.
- Increase mowing frequency as lawn growth picks up.
- **Summer (December - February):**
 - Peak season for grassy weeds (Paspalum, Crabgrass, Crowsfoot) and Nutgrass.
 - Spot treat grassy weeds carefully.
 - Continue treatment of Nutgrass as it's actively growing.
 - Ensure proper watering to help the lawn cope with heat and humidity.

Key Takeaways for the Gold Coast:

- **Healthy Lawn First:** A robust, well-maintained lawn is your primary defense.
- **Pre-Emergents are Gold:** Don't skip them for seasonal weed prevention.
- **Identify Your Weeds:** Knowing what you're dealing with dictates the treatment.
- **Buffalo Grass Caution:** Always check herbicide labels for suitability on Buffalo and other sensitive turf types. "Weed 'n' Feed" products are often not safe for Buffalo.
- **Nutgrass is a Beast:** Requires persistent, specific treatment (manual removal of tubers, or Halosulfuron-methyl herbicides).
- **Safety First:** Always wear appropriate PPE when using herbicides and follow instructions.

By combining good lawn care practices with targeted weed control methods, you can significantly reduce weed problems and enjoy a lush, green lawn on the Gold Coast.