

Feeding corn to your lawn

Corn gluten meal is a natural way to control weeds in the landscape. Best of all, it is completely safe. You can even eat it!

The use of corn gluten meal as an herbicide was discovered during turfgrass research conducted at Iowa State University. This by-product of corn milling was observed to prevent turfgrass seeds from sprouting. Further research has shown that it also prevents other seeds from sprouting, including seeds from weeds such as crabgrass, chickweed, and dandelions.

Corn gluten meal will only kill seeds that are trying to germinate. It will not kill weed plants that are already established.

Corn gluten meal will kill seeds of both annual and perennial weeds. As for annuals (for example, crabgrass and foxtail), which naturally die from frost, corn gluten meal prevents their seeds from germinating in the future. As for perennials (for example, dandelions, and creeping

charlie), corn gluten meal won't be able to kill the plants already established in the lawn. But it will kill the seeds they shed each summer, so the population of these particular weeds won't increase. In fact, because weeds will die of "natural" causes, their numbers should actually decrease after several years of consistent use of corn gluten meal.

How to apply to lawns

Corn gluten meal is available in powdered and pelletized forms, both of which work well. The pelletized form is easier to handle.

Apply corn gluten meal first in early May, then a second time around mid-August. Spread the product evenly, at a rate of 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet of lawn. Water it lightly into the soil in order to activate it. Corn gluten meal should remain effective for five to six weeks each time you apply it.

Don't expect to see instant results from using corn gluten meal. Every consecutive year you apply corn gluten meal should give you better results than the year before. By the fourth year, weed control should be very good.

Corn gluten meal contains 10% nitrogen. When you use it you are also fertilizing the lawn, which encourages it to grow thicker and help exclude weeds. Applying corn gluten meal at the recommended rate of 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet, twice a




year, gives your lawn a total of 4 pounds of nitrogen annually—more than enough to meet its needs. Corn gluten meal does not supply phosphorus or potassium, but most soils in North Dakota already have sufficient amounts of these nutrients.

Garden applications

Corn gluten meal may be used safely in gardens around established perennial plants (such as shrubs, perennial flowers, and asparagus) to keep weed seeds from sprouting. It can also be used after vegetable and flower transplants have been in the soil long enough to have "taken hold." Follow label recommendations.

If you are sowing seeds in your garden, wait until seedlings are up and growing well before applying corn gluten meal. Otherwise, the corn gluten meal will kill your garden seeds.

The downside

Corn gluten meal is much more expensive compared to most synthetic herbicides. It can also be hard to find. Check places that sell garden supplies, farm stores or county co-ops that sell seed and grain for hobby farms, and some stores that specialize in selling food for wild birds. 

Source: University of Minnesota

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Published May 2009
Revised November 2011