

How to control nutsedge in corn or soybeans

LANCASTER — Nutsedge? Nutgrass? Call it what you like, but either way this weed spells trouble for farmers.

Nutsedge is a perennial plant with an extensive underground root system of strobons and tubers, or nutlets. It is a member of the sedge family, though it is often mistaken for a grass because of its narrow leaf.

The plant's triangular, solid stem is one way to distinguish it from a grass.

Two species of nutsedge are found in the United States. Yellow nutsedge, the most widespread, infests cropland throughout the Northeast.

Purple nutsedge, a more persistent variety, is primarily found in Texas and along the Coastal Plain.

Yellow nutsedge plants are yellowish-green in color and grow to 30 inches tall. Stolons radiate from the plant, ending in tubers. Tubers may then produce new plants. Straw-colored flowers appear within 60 days of plant emergence.

Purple nutsedge is similar to yellow, though plants are dark green in color, produce reddish-purple seed heads and grow to only 15 inches tall. It, too, produces stolons. But unlike yellow nutsedge, the purple variety produces new plants in series, forming "tuber chains."

Both nutsedge varieties are also prolific seed producers, yielding

up to 100 million viable seeds per acre. Nevertheless, agronomists still regard tubers as the key to nutsedge reproduction and the major obstacle in the weed's

control.

Tuber populations can reach 30 million per acre in the plow layer of heavily infested fields.

Unlike weed seeds, tubers

germinate from as deep as 12 inches, though most plants emerge from the upper six inches of soil.

University weed scientists contend that the spread of nutsedge in recent years is due partly to the improved control of common annual grasses and broadleaf weeds in the field crops.

This factor, plus the trend of earlier planting and reduced tillage, they say, has opened the door for heavy nutsedge infestations all over the country.

It is virtually impossible to eradicate nutsedge, but using an integrated program of cultural practices, herbicides and tillage (before and after the crop is planted) will let farmers produce a profitable crop on nutsedge-infested acreage.

Nutsedge cannot compete effectively in the shade, therefore, growing taller crops such as corn or soybeans will give farmers an edge in controlling this aggressive perennial. Narrow row spacings are generally recommended to provide the most shade.

No effective surface-applied herbicide treatments are available for controlling nutsedge in field crops. Preplant incorporated herbicides are essential so the chemical will be in close contact with the sprouting tubers.

Incorporation also helps destroy sprouted and dormant tubers by placing them up on the soil surface

where they will die, as tubers are sensitive to drying.

Because tubers can germinate deeper than annual weed seeds, farmers may find it necessary to incorporate their herbicide deeper than normal. A higher application rate may also be needed. Be sure to check the herbicide's label for specific application instructions.

In corn, Sutan+ is the most popular preplant treatment for controlling nutsedge. Its field-proven performance over the years has made it the most widely recommended herbicide for controlling the yellow or purple variety.

Eradicane will also control yellow nutsedge. This herbicide may be preferred over Sutan+ if other tough weeds such as johnsongrass or quackgrass are present in the same field.

Five pounds of atrazine 80-W or four quarts of the 4-L formulation may be used alone to suppress yellow nutsedge. Farmers should keep in mind that atrazine residues will persist for two years, requiring corn to be planted for two consecutive years.

Dual and Lasso, if incorporated, also will control yellow nutsedge.

Corn growers have two postemergence herbicide treatments available for controlling yellow nutsedge. Atrazine with crop oil may be applied when

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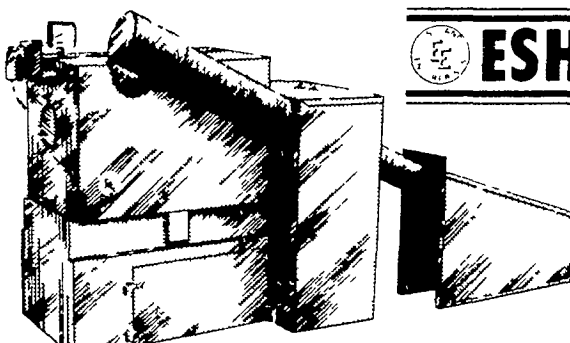
Yellow nutsedge, common throughout the Northeast, is easily identified by its yellow-green color, underground stolons and tubers, and triangular feel of stem when rolled between one's fingers.


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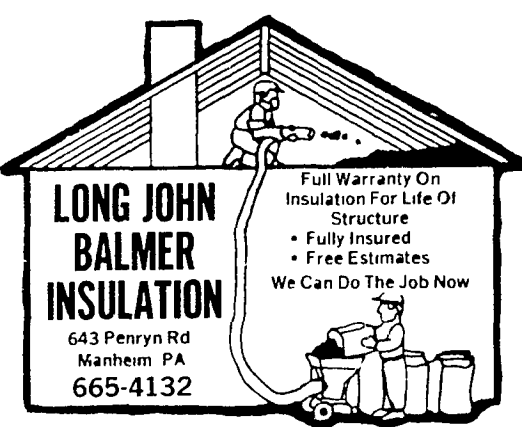
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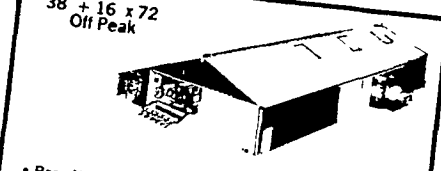
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