

Yellow Nutsedge - A Turfgrass Imposter

Rain in late July is always welcome in Oklahoma, giving our turfgrass (and our water bill!) some relief from the heat and relentless sun. Not only the turfgrass benefits, though...other lawn weeds, like yellow nutsedge (nutgrass), embrace it with new unwanted growth and vigor - such that most homeowners may mistake the weed invasion for a "healthy stand of grass".

What is Yellow Nutsedge?

Yellow nutsedge is the common name for the scientific *Cyperus esculentus*. This perennial weed is also known as chufa, watergrass or nutgrass, and can be found throughout North America. It has an aggressive vegetative growth habit and like warm season turfgrasses, enjoys full sun and proper irrigation in the heat of the summer. Although it is somewhat drought tolerant, yellow nutsedge prefers

moist soil of varying textures. It can grow to a height of 2.5 feet, but in most frequently-mowed lawns never reaches that height. Therefore, it can blend in well amongst your turfgrass until the encroachment is complete.



Learning to identify the plant and careful observation and chemical and cultural control measures are key to heading off any onslaught mounted by this pervasive plant.

Identifying Yellow Nutsedge

Yellow nutsedge is a sedge - not a grass - but is a perennial grass-like weed. The underground stems are called rhizomes, and their small tuber "nutlets" form the survival structure that allow nutsedge to overwinter and propagate in the spring.

Understanding the plant's structure helps to [identify yellow nutsedge](#), and once identified, can guide you to the appropriate herbicide if necessary.

See below for the identifying characteristics and growth habits of yellow nutsedge.

Leaf	Stem	Root Structure	Seeds/Flowers
Yellow-green to green	3-sided (triangular) solid (not hollow)	Tubers ("nutlets") and rhizomes	Yellow/brown spikelets
Grouped in threes	Produce yellow/brown spikelets at terminal end	Primary propagation by rhizome/nutlets	Low propagation by seed
Flat, taper to point	Erect habit		
Shiny, hairless, midvein ridge			
Upright form			

Table 1. Yellow nutsedge identification and growth habit.

Prevention and Control

Yellow nutsedge is a tough perennial plant and eradication will take effort. Mechanical control (pulling or digging) that does not kill or remove the nutlets is largely ineffective. Because yellow nutsedge propagates by root structure and not seed, [a systemic chemical herbicide is the most effective strategy](#) to eliminate regrowth, and [cultivating healthy turfgrass in its place](#) should help prevent further infestations.

Larger and older infestations will likely require multiple applications of a selective, systemic postemergence herbicide. These should be used in late spring/early summer before the nutsedge spreads vegetatively and begins to produce its network of underground survival and propagation structures.

Consult [OSU Fact Sheet HLA-6421](#) to identify the selective herbicides designed for grassy weed control. Become familiar with the best timing for application, the efficacy to the target, potential risk to surrounding turf and vegetation, and the overall safety precautions for application. Always carefully read, understand and follow label instructions when using any herbicide product.

Don't let a turfgrass imposter like yellow nutsedge take over your lawn! Plan a late spring chemical control strategy for your nutsedge problem by consulting the [Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service website](#), the [Tulsa Master Gardeners](#), and other resources located through the [links at the end of this article](#).

© 2020, Terri Denney. All rights reserved.

Resources

- [OSU: HLA-6420 - Lawn Management in Oklahoma](#)
- [OSU: HLA-6421 - Controlling Weeds in Home Lawns](#)
- [Guide To Effective Weed Control: PSS-2750](#)
- [Tulsa Master Gardeners: Turf Weed Identification](#)
- [University of Missouri Division of Plant Sciences: Weed ID Guide](#)
- [Natural Resources Conservation Service Plants Database](#)