



# Hort Notes

An educational newsletter with research-based information for businesses and individuals involved in selling, planning, designing, servicing, and enjoying landscapes and gardens.

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## Current Monitoring Checklist:

**PLANT PHENOLOGY: BETWEEN 1700 - 1999 GROWING DEGREE DAYS**

[http://www.umassgreeninfo.org/fact\\_sheets/ipmtools/1700\\_1999\\_GDD.html](http://www.umassgreeninfo.org/fact_sheets/ipmtools/1700_1999_GDD.html)

## Yellow Nutsedge Management

Yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus* L.), also called nutgrass, yellow nutgrass or chufa, is a warm-season perennial and a member of the sedge family or Cyperaceae. Nutsedge is not a grass despite its grass-like leaves and growth habit. Yellow nutsedge is found throughout North America and is a difficult to control weed in many agricultural and horticultural crops, including turfgrass, landscapes and nurseries. The species thrives in a wide range of soil types and conditions, but prefers areas that are moist to wet and sunny.

Erect stems are solitary and 3-sided. These triangular stems are apparent with a cross-section cut or if the stem is rolled between one's fingers. The 5 to 8 mm, yellow to light green leaves have a ridged mid-vein, are distinctly shiny, and taper to a sharp point. Leaves arise from the plant base and are three-ranked (in groups of 3). Flowers form



*Cyperus esculentus* (Yellow nutsedge) A, Habit; B, spikelet; C, achene. From *Common Weeds of the United States*, USDA, 1971.

yellow to light brown terminal spikelets. These spikelets occur on flower stalks that originate from a common point (umbel-like) at the end of the triangular stems.

Reproduction is principally by small tubers called nutlets. Nutlets are round, ridged and white, turning brown with age, and form at the end of whitish rhizomes. The above ground portion of the plant does not overwinter and nutlets give rise to new plants the following spring. Nutsedge also spreads by rhizomes and seeds, though seedlings are uncommon. Yellow nutsedge has a rapid shoot growth rate and during periods of active growth in mid to late summer can grow 2 to 5 inches above the turfgrass canopy. This characteristic, in combination with its yellow to light green color, breaks turf uniformity and makes nutsedge very noticeable from late June through early September.

If only a few yellow nutsedge plants are present, hand pulling can be an effective way to prevent additional spreading, though hand-pulling in heavy or compacted soils will result in nutlets detaching from the rhizomes. These detached nutlets will produce new plants. A spade fork can be used to loosen soil before pulling plants in order to maximize the number of nutlets removed. Attempt to pull plants when they are small and before they begin to produce nutlets. The area will need to be rechecked for regrowth several weeks later and several pullings may be needed. If excessive soil moisture is suspected of contributing to an infestation, modify your irrigation schedule and/or improve site drainage.

While hand-pulling and modifications of site conditions may be effective in some situations, most nutsedge infestations in turf areas will require herbicide applications in order to achieve satisfactory control. **Since yellow nutsedge is not a grass or a broadleaf weed, it is not controlled with applications of the traditional turfgrass weed control products.** Fortunately, turf managers have two herbicides, bentazon (Basagran T/O™, Lescogran™) and halosulfuron (Manage™), that will selectively control nutsedge in cool-season grasses. Available through retailers are several “nutsedge control” products containing an organic-arsenical herbicide, generally MSMA, either alone or in combination with broadleaf herbicides. The effectiveness of these products is dependent on the user following label directions.

Regardless of the product selected, applications are most effective when made in the late spring through early summer when nutsedge is young and actively growing. More than one application may be needed to achieve acceptable control. Mature nutsedge plants are very difficult to control and applications made late in the season are often not effective. In areas where turfgrass has been crowded out, nutsedge can be treated with Roundup™ and the area reseeded.

In landscapes, thick layers of mulch, even those underlaid with landscape fabrics, often fail to prevent nutsedge from becoming established. Despite this fact, mulches and hand-pulling (previously mentioned) will suppress growth and are important management tools for nutsedge in landscapes. Nutsedge does not grow as vigorous in shaded areas and tall, dense ground covers may also suppress infestations. Monitor newly planted ornamentals and control nutsedge as soon as it is noticed.

Nutsedge management becomes more difficult once landscapes and nursery fields have been planted. Therefore, in areas where nutsedge is known to be a problem, control attempts should be made prior to

planting. Herbicide options for established landscapes and nursery fields included bentazon (BasagranT/O™, Lescogran™), EPTC (Preen for Ground Cover™), glyphosate (Roundup™) or metolachlor (Pennant Magnum™). Consult product label for rates and tolerances of specific ornamentals.

*Randy Prostack*

*UMass Extension Educator - Landscape, Nursery and Urban Forestry*

Disclaimer: Where trade names (™) are used for identification, no product endorsement is implied nor is discrimination intended against similar materials. The authors have assembled the most reliable information available at time of printing. Due to constantly changing laws and regulations, UMass Extension can assume no liability for recommendations.

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## Questions from You

*Q. Where can I find a list of towns in Massachusetts that have local water restrictions?*

A. Go to [www.umassdroughtinfo.org](http://www.umassdroughtinfo.org) and click on “Local Water Restrictions.” The site offers articles for landscapers and nursery operators on management strategies and the effects of drought on landscapes.

*Q. Where can landscape professionals find answers to horticulture questions?*

A. From UMass Extension there are two options. The first is to go to [www.umassgreeninfo.org](http://www.umassgreeninfo.org) and click on the “Greenboard.” This is a question and answer discussion forum. Answers are provided by professionals as well as UMass Extension educators. Following are two recent examples. The second option is to contact an Extension educator directly. Contact information is listed on the same web site as the Greenboard.

*Kathleen M. Carroll*

*UMass Extension Educator - Landscape, Nursery and Urban Forestry*

*Q. Back in the middle of June, I had my magnolia tree pruned. It was fine for a week or so, then I started noticing leaves shriveling up and dropping off the tree. It then recovered and started to push out new growth. Now, within the last seven days, the same thing is happening again - the new buds and pods are falling off. It seems to be dying very fast. Any ideas or solutions?*

A. It is difficult to determine the exact cause of the problem with your magnolia. It does sound like a tree in acute distress though. The ability of the tree to either take up and/or transport water to the leaves and branches has been compromised. It is unlikely that a disease or insect would cause the sudden

death of a magnolia. However, magnolia is sensitive to drought and heat, and many parts of Massachusetts have had extended periods of below normal precipitation several times during the last five years or so. Trees can tolerate drought and heat for a while but sensitive trees like magnolia gradually weaken when they are exposed to these stresses. The warm and relatively dry weather in late June and so far in July may have finally weakened the tree to the point that it is near death.

If the tree is still alive, consider applying a slow soaking irrigation to the root zone (wetting the soil to a depth of 10-14 inches) at least once a week during dry weather. A soaker hose is an effective way to do this. Water for several hours before midday so there is a minimum of water lost to evaporation. Apply two to four inches of organic mulch over the root zone to help retain soil moisture and keep the soil cooler. This is not a good time to fertilize the tree. That can actually cause the tree harm when conditions are so dry and the tree is under water stress.

*Dan Gillman*  
*UMass Extension Plant Pathologist*

*Q. I live in Chatham, Mass. on Cape Cod and every year at this time my lawn is covered with nutsedge. Do you have any suggestions how I can either control it or kill it for good?*

A. Nutsedge grows best on wet sites, therefore irrigation practices should not result in overwatering. There are several products available for nutsedge control in turfgrass. Postemergence "crabgrass and nutsedge" products that are available at many retailers can be effective, however two or three applications are often required and some temporary discoloration may occur. Commercial applicators have available for their use either bentazon (Basagran™) or halosulfuron (Manage™). Both herbicides will generally result in more effective control than the previously mentioned "crabgrass and nutsedge" products. In areas where nutsedge has crowded out all desirable turfgrasses, you can use Roundup™ and then reseed the area. For small infestations, repeated hand-pulling is effective. For more detailed information, see the article on page 1.

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