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# News, Tips From The Mountain West

### Corny Natural Herbicide Works



It feeds cattle, poultry, fish and dogs. Now, increasingly, corn gluten meal is being used to weed and feed lawns.

More than a decade ago, scientists at Iowa State University accidentally discovered that this byproduct of the corn wet-milling process keeps seedlings from forming roots. Applied early in spring and again in late summer, it keeps seeds of barnyardgrass, crabgrass, curlydock, dandelion, foxtails, lamb-squarters, pigweed, plantain, purslane and other lawn weeds from sprouting.

Because 10 percent of its weight is nitrogen, it's also a natural fertilizer.

"It's pretty effective," says Don Morishita, University of Idaho extension weed scientist. "You can get really good weed control initially, although as the corn gluten meal starts to break down and release nitrogen, the weeds that survive can really take off."

Activation of corn gluten meal requires moisture, but too much water can compromise its effectiveness. Ideally, the product will attack seeds for five to six weeks following application.

In lawns, recommended rates for the powdered and pelletized forms of corn gluten meal vary from 12 to 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet, depending on the specific product.

Because it's a potential threat to all ungerminated seeds—not just weeds—gardeners shouldn't use corn gluten meal in freshly sowed flower or vegetable beds until the desired plants are

up and growing. The product prevents roots from forming but doesn't kill established roots.

Research suggests that the effectiveness of corn gluten meal improves with every season of use. Presumably, that's because the product is chipping away at many years' worth of poised-to-sprout weed seeds. "Anybody who is looking for an alternative to synthetic herbicides should try it," says Morishita. "You have to keep using it, but that's the case with synthetic herbicides, too. You'll always have new weed seeds blowing into your yard."

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1-800-221-7645

Soil Technologies Corp  
2103 185th St  
Fairfield, IA 52556-9232

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