Weed of Interest: Kyllinga (Pasture Spikesedge)

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There seems to always be a new weed on the block. This month we are looking for kyllinga (Pasture Spikesedge), because if it is on your block, then you will likely be seeing it in your turfgrass soon. Although a few species of Kyllinga have become weedy in the southern and eastern United States, one species in particular, Kyllinga gracillima, has spread rapidly to New York and southern New England in the last 20 years. This species has several common names, including: false green kyllinga, pasture spikesedge and Asiatic greenhead sedge. On Long Island, this weed has become a locally troublesome lawn and landscape weed at several sites in the last few years. It was observed as a weed infesting a container nursery in Suffolk County. Taxonomically, kyllinga is very closely related to yellow nutsedge. In fact, kyllinga used to be considered a part of the nutsedge (Cyperus) genus.

False green kyllinga flowers in mid- to late summer and produces small ball-shaped seed heads atop single triangular stalks. The seed heads are usually surrounded by three leaves (bracts) about 3-4 inches long. The plants can spread easily to new sites by ripe seed; the easily shed seed can be carried on equipment or wet shoes or animal fur. We have recently seen neighborhoods that are becoming heavily infested with this weed. The infestations can be traced back to one or two properties that were initially infested from which the kyllinga seed was unknowingly spread. The plant itself can survive and spread under frequent mowing. The reason that there is a low awareness of this weed is that it resembles common turfgrass in the spring and early summer. However, in the late summer, when turfgrass often gets discolored by disease or other stresses, the kyllinga patches become very obvious dark green patches in the lawn. Within the lawn, a new infestation mainly spreads by short vigorous rhizomes which give rise to new shoots at or near the soil surface. As the rhizomes (modified shoots) grow, the new shoots allow individual plants to become patchy colonies up to several feet in diameter. In the landscaped beds, the plants will easily move to cultivated and mulched areas and quickly establish. However, because it is a short and narrow leaved plant, it can easily be overlooked or mistaken for turfgrass in this setting.
Management considerations:
The first defense against this weed is to scout for it in properties during the fall and late winter. The texture and color of the leaves will allow it to stand out from the lawn at that time of year. If the infestations are small, then hand removal of the plant, including the entire root system, may be the best way to eradicate it. This should be followed with reseeding or re-sodding as soon as possible. If the weed is well established, then it is important to keep a close eye on it the following spring. Since we know it can be moved to new properties on equipment, then cleaning tires and mower decks between maintenance jobs is one way to slow its spread.

Preliminary research recently conducted at the LI Horticultural Research & Extension Center has evaluated preemergence herbicides commonly used for crabgrass control. We wanted to determine if these materials would also be able to minimize new kyllinga infestations by controlling seedling development. Our results indicate that conventional herbicides such as Pendulum Aquacap, Tenacity and Ronstar provided greater than 90% control 6 weeks after application. Dimension did not provide the same level of control this period.

Since it can ‘fly under the radar’ for the early part of the season, postemergence control is probably of greater importance for this weed. Unfortunately our chemical tools for managing this weed in turf on Long Island are very limited. Halosulfuron (Sedgehammer and other trade names) is labeled as a suppressant, but not a complete control. Spot treating halosulfuron as soon as infestations become evident is probably the best herbicide management we have available to keep this weed at bay. We will continue to evaluate other management options for this potentially troublesome weed.