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Watch Your Turf

For those of you who live for your lawn and work to make it look its best here are some issues to watch out for during summer.

Dollar spot may occur on bluegrass, zoysia or Bermuda grass although it is rarely an issue on warm season grass in a home lawn. The disease creates small spots in the yard that vary in diameter (1 to 6 inches) depending on the height of the grass. These spots will eventually grow together if the disease is not controlled. It is easy to diagnose on Kentucky bluegrass (a cool season grass) by the lesion on the leaf blade which resembles an hour glass. On warm season grasses this tan lesion will girdle the leaf blade and may be surrounded by a darker brown band. This disease usually starts in early summer but signs may not be apparent until heat begins to stress the turf. Control is not usually required but watering early in the morning helps to reduce the fungus.

Brown patch affects tall fescue, and bluegrass. Symptoms on foliage include light tan lesions with dark brown borders. These can be any shape. Outbreaks may occur during hot, humid weather with cooler nights when leaf blades remain wet. Control strategies include irrigating in the morning. Do not water during the day or at night as this promotes the spread of the disease. For most homeowners the turf will recover within 4 weeks unless the crown has been affected. Reseed areas that have been damaged in the fall or have a professional apply fungicides.

Pythium attacks bluegrass, fescue and ryegrass. It is active in hot, humid weather on cool season turf, especially when the nights are cooler and dew persists. This disease hitches a ride on shoes and equipment causing it to spread quickly. The softball sized areas contain grass blades that are mushy and stick together. Mycelium (cottony hairs) may be present in the morning which can help to identify the problem. Manage the disease by managing water and soil. Reduce compaction and improve drainage to eliminate wet areas. Fungicides can be applied during summer to reduce the spread of disease once it has been identified. These are available from professional lawn care services.

In each disease case, high levels of nitrogen promote new growth which is desired by each disease. Do not over fertilize or add more fertilizer while the disease is actively growing. Dethatching or aeration of turf can be done in the fall to further open up the thatch and soil layers to air. This will help turf growth and reduce disease pressure. This practice is ideal before fall seeding of cool season varieties. Although this is the time of year when these diseases may appear each of them can also be confused with heat/moisture stress. Look for the lesions of leaf blades. If they are not present then heat stress may be the enemy.

The Extension office is open Monday - Friday, located in Kennett, Missouri at 233 North Main Street. For horticulture questions contact the horticulture specialist at 573-686-8064. MU is an equal opportunity/ADA institution.