

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

May 2004

Dear Newsletter Reader, I'm happy to inform you that I now have a search engine on my Web Site <http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>. All information in past newsletters, as well as over the entire Web Site, is available by search. Just type in the query and the search engine should take you to the appropriate location.

TURF

Diagnosing lawn problems -

Now is the time that you will begin to see those yellow spots in your lawn. These spots or patches can be caused by one or more problems, which need to be correctly identified if the problem is to be solved.



Irrigation system - Number one is to make sure that your irrigation system is working properly. Check for mechanical problems first i.e. broken sprinkler heads, broken lines, etc. Make sure that the trouble spots are receiving enough water. Just looking at the spray patterns will not be enough. Sometimes, the problem area may appear to be getting enough water when it really is not. Put out some coffee cans, tuna fish cans or some other flat sided container and check the actual output in that area. It should be about 3/4 of an inch at

each irrigation event and maybe as much as 1 inch in sandy locations such as the old grove areas in Davenport.

Sometimes these trouble spots get so dry that they will not wet. You may be applying the correct amount of water, but it simply runs off and does not soak in. Adding laundry detergent granules, like Tide, will help break the surface tension of the soil particles and allow the water to penetrate. Aerating the soil may also help.

Buried items - Another common problem is buried items. Contractors are not supposed to bury construction debris, but at one time this was a common practice and probably continues today. This problem is going to make the grass appear yellow and wilt quickly because the roots are trying to survive in soil only a few inches deep.

Insect problems - After you have eliminated irrigation and buried objects as possible problems, then think about possible insect problems. Right now the prime suspect is chinch bugs. I find many people applying insecticides when they have a fungus problem and vice-versa. Probably the best way to detect chinch bugs, as well as other insect pests, is with a soap flush. Mix 1.5 ounces of dish detergent with 2 gallons water and pour

onto the location where the grass is being affected, but not killed. Watch what comes up. You will see creatures that you should recognize like ants, spiders, roaches, earwigs, ground beetles and long skinny rove beetles. Be watching for chinch bugs. They are little black bugs about 1/8 of an inch long with white wings laying flat on their back. The nymphs, or young of chinch bugs are red with a white band - they do not have wings.

If you find chinch bugs, then treat with a product that contains bifenthrin as the active ingredient. One of these products is Ortho Ant, Flea and Tick Killer for Lawns. You will not need to apply to the whole lawn, just the problem area plus about 10 feet.



Mole crickets and **sod web worms** can also be found with the soap drench. Mole crickets, which are mainly a pest in Bahiagrass, can be treated with a bifenthrin product. The recommended treatment time is mid-June.

Sod web worms, which feed at night on leaf blades and rest on the soil surface during the day, normally are a problem in late July or August on St. Augustinegrass. When you see lots of little brown moths flying around your landscape, check the grass for signs of sod webworm feeding. They can also be controlled with a bifenthrin product.

Another insect problem is **white grubs**, which at times can be quite damaging to turf. A simple test is to cut 3 sides of a square with a shovel. Also, make a cut under the square with a shovel so that the turf piece can be lifted like a tab. Check underneath for white grubs. If you find numerous grubs, treat with a product that has imadicloprid as the active ingredient (Bayer Advanced Grub Control for Lawns - Walmart).

Diseases - If the irrigation is working

properly and you don't find any insects, then start considering disease as a source of the problem. Slime is the easiest as it can be washed off with a hose. This fungus covers the grass in spots with a black soot-like growth. No controls are needed.

Leaf spots - Two common leafspots found on warm season turfgrasses, which you should be able to recognize, are **gray leaf spot** and **Cercospera leaf spot**. Gray leaf spot disease makes small ash colored leaf spots with purple to brown margins on the leaf blades. You will commonly find this disease on St. Augustinegrass during the summer months.

Cercospera leaf spot disease causes brown to purple leaf spots in patches 2-3 inches in diameter. In high disease severity, entire leaves will yellow, wither and die. This disease also occurs during hot wet weather.

Gray leaf spot can be controlled with products like Banner MAXX with propaquinazole (Lesco), Bayer Advanced Fungus Control for Lawns with triadimefon (Lowe's) or Scotts Lawn Fungus Control with thiophanate-methyl (Walmart). No chemicals are available which will give complete control of cercospera leaf spot, but the above products will give some suppression.

Fairy ring fungus disease is usually pretty easy to diagnose. There are 3 types: 1) has dead rings, 2) turf has semi circular rings of lush green growth - mushrooms may be present and 3) mushrooms present, but the grass is unaffected. Recommended chemical treatments are Heritage, which is extremely expensive, and flutolanil (ProStar) available at Lesco. Keep in mind that the fairy ring fungus is feeding on buried organic matter like tree trunks, lumber, etc. It may be necessary to remove these organic matter sources to completely control this disease.



Spots and patches - The last group to discuss are the fungi that cause brown patches. Dollar spot disease makes a small patch about 1-2 inches and could be attributed to dog urine. Generally this can be avoided by using recommended amounts of nitrogen fertilizer.



The larger and more damaging patches (from a few to several feet) include **brown patch** (*Rhizoctonia solani*), **Rhizoctonia leaf and sheath blight** (*Rhizoctonia oryzae* or *zeae*) and the worst **take-all root rot**.

Brown patch is easy to diagnose and normally occurs in spring and fall. The grass sheath (which holds the grass leaf) rots so that the leaf blades can be easily pulled from the sheath. The roots usually appear white and healthy looking. The disease can be controlled with Banner MAXX, Immunox with myclobutanil, Scotts Lawn fungus Control or Bayer Advanced Fungus Control for Lawns.

Rhizoctonia leaf and sheath blight causes patches from a few inches to a few feet, but does not cause the sheaths to rot like the brown patch fungus and is usually a summer disease. Spots may be observed on the leaves at the edge of the ring. There are several fungicides recommended for control of this disease, but the common one that is locally available (Dotys in Winter Haven) is Terrachlor.

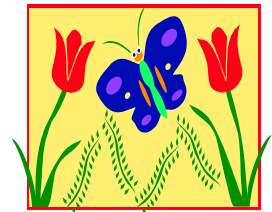
The last and worst patch disease is **take-all root rot**. This disease, as the name implies, attacks the roots. It is most common on St. Augustinegrass and Bermudagrass and is worst during the summer months. The disease persists in the ground so if turf is replaced it also can be infected. This disease can be partially control with Banner MAXX, Bayer Advanced Fungus Control for Lawns and Scotts Lawn Fungus Control.

If you are unsure of a possible disease problem, a sample can be sent to the UF Plant Disease Clinic for analysis. There is a \$20.00 fee for this service.

Remember, that your turf maintenance practices such as improper mowing, over or under watering, over or under fertilization and improper herbicide treatments can have significant impacts on the severity of insect and disease problems in your lawn.

BUTTERFLY GARDENING

Nectar plants - Butterfly nectar plants include glossy abelia, ageratum, butterfly bush, purple coneflower, impatiens, verbena, blazing star, pentas, firecracker plant, pineapple sage, porterweed, zinnia, lily of the Nile, Butterfly weed, cosmos, firebush, shrimp plant, Lantana, firespike, plumbago, azalea, wild petunia and Mexican sunflower.



Larval plants - Plants upon which butterfly larvae will feed on include asters, mallows and thistle (American painted lady), parsley and wild carrot (American swallowtail), hickories and oaks (Banded Hairstreak), mustards, peppergrass and spider flower (Great Checkered and Great Southern White), legumes (Common and Orange Sulfur), parsley, fennel, dill and carrot (Easter Black Swallowtail), ash, plums and yellow poplar (Eastern Tiger Swallowtail), citrus (Giant Swallowtail), passion flower (Gulf Fritillary), red and sweet bay, (Laurel Swallowtail), milkweed (Monarch), Dutchman's Pipe (Pipevine Swallowtail), oleander and milkweed (Queen), elms, hackberry, mulberries and parsley (Question Mark), apples, cherries and willows (Viceroy), pawpaw (Zebra Swallowtail) and maypops (Zebra Longwing).

Helpful hints -Put your plants in sunny areas.



Group plant colors together, as it will make the plants easier for the butterflies to find. Remember the butterfly larvae will probably devour your plants, so don't worry. Use wet sand or mud as a watering hole for butterflies to obtain water and nutrients. Furnish a basking stone so that butterflies spread and warm up their wings on cool mornings. Shelter can be provided for butterflies by varying plant size and using trellises which give the butterflies protection from wind, storms and predators. Be very careful when using pesticides anywhere close to the butterfly garden location.

MISC. MAY GARDENING

Flowers to plant - angelonia, balsam, begonias, black eyed Susan, blue daze, browallia, bush daisy, butterfly weed, cat's whiskers, celosia, coleus, coreopsis, crossandra, Dahlberg daisy, gaillardia, gazania, gerbera, goldenrod, gomphrena, impatiens, liatris, marigolds, melampodium, moon vine, nicotiana, nierembergia, pentas, periwinkle, Porter weed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, sunflower, torenia, verbena and zinnias.

Vegetables to plant - calabaza, chayote, cherry tomato, collards, dasheen, Malabar spinach, malanga, New Zealand spinach, okra, pepper, roselle, Seminole pumpkin, Southern pea, sweet potato, tamarillo, yam and yard long bean.

Poinsettia - When new shoots are 10-12 inches long, cut them back leaving 4 leaves on each shoot. New shoots will develop from each pruning point. And, when these reach 10-12 inches in length prune again and continue to do this throughout the summer. Don't cut shoots back after September 10th

because you may affect flowering.

Palms - This a good time of the year to add a palm to your landscape. When you buy a palm, you need to think in terms of cold hardiness. There are several cold hardy palms which don't grow over 8-9 feet tall such as lady palm, dwarf palmetto, European fan palm, saw palmetto and windmill palm. Taller cold hardy palms include pindo, cabbage, Canary date palm, Washington and Chinese fan palms.



Magnolias - I have had several calls about magnolia leaves turning yellow and dropping. Generally magnolias can look sick during the spring. At this time of the year much of the foliage has leaf spots. Some of the leaves turns yellow and fall to the ground. Don't worry, in a few weeks they will start growing and look beautiful again.

White and brown spots are often seen during the fall and winter months on magnolias. The brown spots are a fungus which usually does not need control. The white spots are a scale, called white magnolia scale and is usually controlled by parasites and predators.

Have your soil tested for pH and phosphorous by the UF or the Polk County Master Gardeners.

Have a good gardening day,

David Shibles, Urban Horticulturist
Polk County Cooperative Extension Service
P.O. Box 9005, Drawer HS03
Bartow, FL 33831-9005
(863) 519-8677

For Polk County Gardening Information and Horticultural Links visit:
<http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>