LAWN PROBLEMS .... dying or dead areas in the lawn

Start Here

Did the problem appear suddenly within the last month, and it has not occurred repeatedly in the same spot in past years? NO

Look very closely at the individual grass blades. Is there any evidence of the blades being notched or chewed? NO

Are the troubled areas in more or less circular patches, or rings or do they have yellowish margins around their perimeter? NO

Is the grass St Augustine? NO

Do individual grass blades have many distinct spots on them, usually tan or grayish in color? NO

Do individual grass blades appear streaked with yellow or red, then turn brown? NO

Is the grass centipedes? NO

No reasonable diagnosis can be made from the information given. The problem is probably caused by a combination of factors. Compare your watering, mowing, and fertilization practices with those we recommend below. Be patient and give the grass time to improve with better care. You may also wish to submit a disease sample to check for presence of take-all root rot or centipede decline fungus. Obtain the submission form from the Extension Office.

Possibly spittlebug damage if in summer to fall. Spittlebugs are black with two orange stripes across their back. Ask our Master Gardener for control recommendations if you see large numbers. Yellowing in the spring is iron chlorosis. See fertilization section at bottom of page.

Ask the Master Gardener for control recommendations.

If you find 2–4 mole crickets in each 2x2 ft area, you need to treat for mole crickets. Ask the Master Gardener for control recommendations.

Mix 1 1/2 oz of liquid dishwashing soap in 2 gallons of water. Quickly drench a 2x2 foot area, seeing if mole crickets.

The grass probably isn’t getting enough sunlight to thrive without optimal care. Try St. Augustine plugs. If they don’t work, try a shade-loving groundcover or mulch of leaves, pine straw, wood chips, or bark.

If you find 2-4 mole crickets in the troubled area, try to push a garden trowel into the soil of the troubled area. Is the soil hard?

Was the problem apparent for most of the day? NO

Does the problem area receive full sun for most of the day? YES

The soil in the troubled area fluffly, appearing to have tiny tunnels near the soil surface? NO

YES - It has been more of a slow decline or it has occurred in the same spot in previous years.

YES - You may have gray leaf spot disease. Ask the Master Gardener for control recommendations.

Check for chinch bugs. Did you find many? They are usually worse in sunny areas.

NO - You have checked the site for nematodes recently through the UF Extension Nematology Lab and followed the recommendations given.

NO - Sod webworms and other lawn caterpillars can feed on the lawn from mid-summer until frost. Ask the Master Gardener for control recommendations. Squirrels also can chew grass, especially St. Augustine grass, year-round. They leave the loose blades scattered on the sod surface where you can rake them up by the handfuls. Damage is generally in patches.

NO - It is possible you have a fungus disease in your lawn, especially if it is in summer, fall, or winter. Ask the Master Gardener for control recommendations. If it is in the early spring, be patient and give the lawn until late May to recover from possible winter damage or old damage from fall or winter pests. Compare your watering, mowing, and fertilization practices with those we recommend below. A powdery or slimy black, gray, tan, or orangish film on the grass in the summer is probably a non-parasitic slime mold that will not harm the grass. Merely wash or sweep it off if you wish.

DO YOU SEE LARGE NUMBERS OF CHAFFING ON THE GRASS BLADES? NO

NO - It has been more of a slow decline or it has occurred in the same spot in previous years.

YES - No reasonable diagnosis can be made from the information given. The problem is probably caused by a combination of factors. Compare your watering, mowing, and fertilization practices with those we recommend below. Be patient and give the grass time to improve with better care. You may also wish to submit a disease sample to check for presence of take-all root rot or centipede decline fungus. Obtain the submission form from the Extension Office.

Compare your watering, mowing, and fertilization practices with those we recommend below. Vague lawn problems are usually the result of a combination of factors. You may also wish to submit a disease sample to check for presence of take-all root rot or centipede decline fungus. Obtain the submission form from the Extension Office.

Obtain the Nematode Sample Kit from your local UF county extension office and follow the instructions for submitting a sample.

YES - Obtain the Plant Problem Diagnostic Clinic Form from the Extension Office.

NO - Obtain the Nematology Lab and UF Extension recentley through the site for nematodes given? You may also wish to send in a disease sample to check for presence of take-all root rot.

No reasonable diagnosis can be made from the information given. The problem is probably caused by a combination of factors. Compare your watering, mowing, and fertilization practices with those we recommend below. Be patient and give the grass time to improve with better care. You may also wish to submit a disease sample to check for presence of take-all root rot or centipede decline fungus. Obtain the submission form from the Extension Office.

If a nematode problem wasn’t found, check the soil for soil compaction. Try to push a garden trowel into the soil of the troubled area. Is the soil hard?

NO - Soil Compaction can limit grass growth. Follow all the practices recommended below and see if the grass improves.
RECOMMENDED GENERAL CARE PRACTICES

**WATER** only when the grass turns grayish, indicating wilt. Then water thoroughly. Measure water applied with a rain gauge in sprinkler pattern. Apply 1/2 inch before turning off the water.

**MOW** regularly, at least every 10 days. Keep the mower blade very sharp so it won’t tear the ends of the grass blades. Mow centipede no lower than 1 1/2 - 2 inches. Mow St. Augustine no lower than 3-4 inches. Mow bahia at 3-4 inches. The mowing height of zoysia depends on the type of zoysia. Mow all grasses higher in shaded areas.

**FERTILIZE** moderately. Centipede, especially does not like being over-fertilized. One April application and sometimes a second August application is all the fertilizer you probably need to apply to centipede. St. Augustine and other grasses may have two or more applications from April through early September. Fertilize less if you want lower maintenance. A 15-0-15 or 15-5-15 fertilizer can be used. A soil test mailing kit can be obtained through your UF county extension office to determine which of these is best for your site. Make sure half of the nitrogen (7.5% in a 15-0-15) is slow-release or water-insoluble nitrogen. Only apply 6 pounds of the fertilizer per 1,000 square feet of lawn area. On centipede, even consider reducing the rate to 3 to 4 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet in the spring and making a second application at the same rate in August. Ferrous sulfate (2 oz in 3-5 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet) or a chelated iron source at labeled rates can be used to reduce yellowing without stimulating excessive grass growth. Never lime unless a soil test indicates the need to do so.

**WEED CONTROL PRODUCTS** may harm your lawn and other landscape plants under certain conditions and/or if applied incorrectly. Concentrate more on growing healthy grass than on killing weeds and you’ll have fewer weeds. Weeds are primarily opportunists that take hold when the grass isn’t growing well.

FOR MORE GARDENING INFORMATION

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