

How Is Your Lawn Now?

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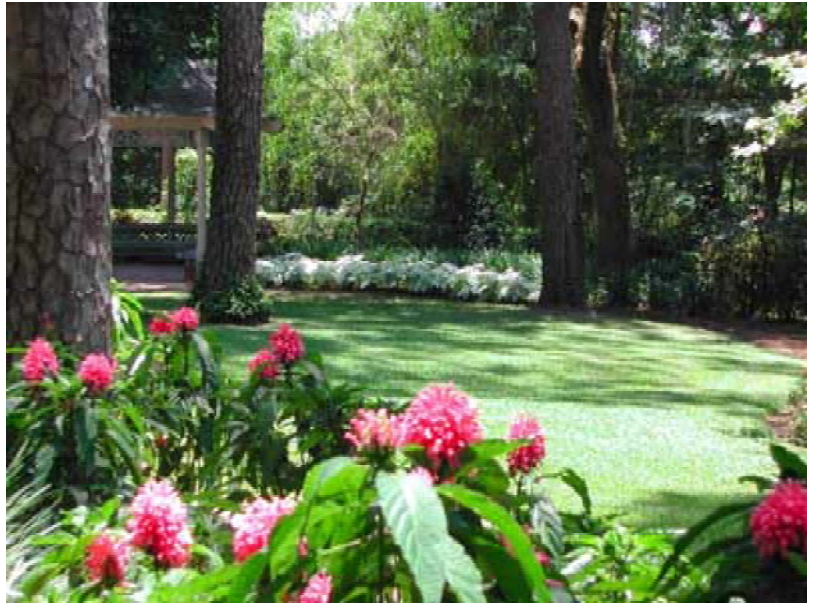
Jacobinia is the pink flower in the foreground.

Thursday, June 20, 2002

Remember back in March and April when your lawn wasn't looking so good? You were worried about all the bare spots and concerned that you needed to be doing something. And I kept telling you to be patient, give the lawn some time, and water as needed. Well, it turned out that lots of watering was needed for most of us this spring. But, hopefully, it also turned out that your lawn is beginning to look much better now.

Most of us are finally receiving some rain now. But, through, this dry spring, we have had to water our lawns once or twice a week. My own St. Augustine grass responded fairly well to the waterings this spring. Any bare spots that I had after the winter began filling in quite quickly.

My centipede grass was a different story. One area in particular came out of winter looking very questionable. In March and April, the grass was so thin in this one area that there just didn't seem to be much hope. I considered doing what I've told many of you to do where you've had continual problems with centipede* plug in some St. Augustine grass plugs. But, I was busy, had other priorities, and just never got around to planting the St. Augustine.



I was looking at this same problem spot just a few days ago. Now that I've received several decent rains, the centipede grass is starting to grow, rapidly. Long runners are sewing their way across the formerly bare areas.

Hopefully many of you are seeing the same thing happen in your lawns. The spots that looked so bad earlier in the spring should be starting to fill in now that the rains are coming.

This growth pattern in centipede lawns is typical in our area. Though the last few years have been more extreme than normal, April and May are typically dry months in our region. For various reasons, centipede lawns often come out of winter with lots of dead or thin spots. They don't grow much in March because the soil is still cool. And, even though we water in April and May, it's still not the same as receiving rainfall. Thunderstorms not only supply more water than we typically apply when watering, but thunderstorms also apply nitrogen. So, once we start receiving the June rains, we often see our lawns respond in leaps and bounds.

So take another look at your lawn now that we've received some rain. If it's starting to look

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much better, then just be glad you were patient. If the lawn is not looking better, then it's time to answer some questions:

* Does your lawn really receive enough sun? Try a few St. Augustine plugs, give them a month, and see if they grow well. If they don't, then you may just have too much shade to grow a lawn in that area.

Is your soil too hard? If the area is in full sun, yet has soil that you can't easily push a shovel into, then realize that the poor soil aeration is what's limiting the grass growth. You can either accept the fact and live with it, or you can dig up the lawn in that area and start over.

Is the area in full sun, with good soil conditions, and now that we're receiving enough rain, still not growing? Then it's time to consider nematodes as a possibility. If your lawn is centipede, often the easiest solution is just to plug in some St. Augustine plugs. St. Augustine is tolerant of ring nematodes. Centipede is not. If you already have St. Augustine and it's not doing well, then you need to run a nematode test. There are other types of nematodes that can damage St. Augustine grass. You can visit the UF-IFAS Extension office at 615 Paul Russell Road on weekdays, 8 to 5, and pick up a mailing kit to send a sample to the University of Florida IFAS Extension Nematology lab. If the test reveals damaging types of nematodes in your St. Augustine, there are some management techniques you will need to learn in order to increase your chances of having a decent lawn.

Realize that chinch bugs can be a problem in St. Augustine grass also. So, you need to learn to recognize chinch bugs and their damage. For more information on chinch bugs and other gardening topics for our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Extension website for Leon County at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Note: The pink flowers in the picture are Jacobinia

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