

Rainy Summer Lawn Problems

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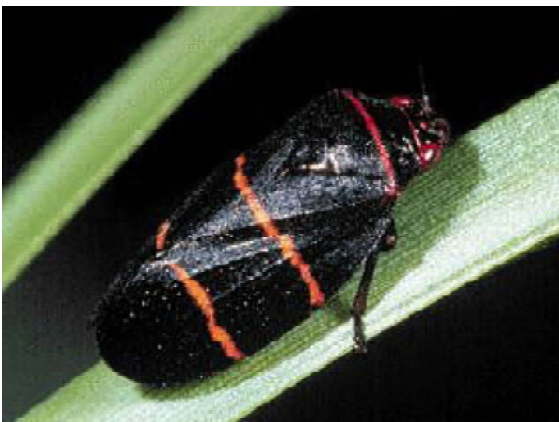
Through the very rainy period we've had recently, the University of Florida IFAS Extension office in Leon County has received a number of calls about lawn problems.

The usual problem is that there are spots in the lawn that are dying rather quickly. The spots are usually described as brown. But with some questioning it is determined that the spots start as yellowed areas, then progress to brown. Often the brown spots even still have yellow margins.

Such a problem is typical of a fungus disease. And with the very frequent rains many of us have received and the lawns being wet for much of the day, it is very possible that there are some fungus diseases active.

If you're like me, you're willing to tolerate a little spotting in the lawn before you're ready to drag out the sprayer and go to work with repeated applications of fungicide. I would certainly encourage you to be patient, because most of these problems will resolve themselves as the frequency of the rains diminishes. But, if you're truly having large areas dying quickly in a well-established lawn, you may wish to spray with a fungicide to slow the spread of the disease. Lawn fungicides containing either chlorothalonil, thiophanate methyl, or propiconazol are effective on several common lawn diseases. But be sure to select a fungicide that has the proper directions for use on home lawns. Check the label before you make your purchase at the garden center.

I was hesitant to write this column, because I don't want all of you jumping to the conclusion that your lawn has a disease just because it has a few spots in it. There are many other things that can cause spots. For example, in St. Augustine lawns, squirrels often feed, creating patches of dead grass. If you examine the area at the end of the day and can rake your hand across it, raking up a handful of grass clippings, squirrels are likely the cause. Chinch bugs can be a problem in St. Augustine grass also, usually in sunny areas of the lawn. Chinch bugs are tiny, but if you look carefully, you can find them. The adults are only about an 1/8 inch long, black with white wing patches. The immatures are a little smaller and reddish.



Centipede lawns may be affected by spittlebugs, those black bugs with two orange stripes across their back. But spittlebugs will be very obvious because they will be so numerous. In fact, you usually see the spittlebugs before you even see damage. That's because it takes a lot of spittlebugs to cause damage. So don't spray for spittlebugs until you see the damage and the spittlebugs.

Another common problem we've encountered this summer is with homeowners who laid St. Augustine sod

in their yard this spring. Now lots of it is dying and they're asking what's killing it. If you're one of these homeowners, you need to remember several factors. The whole reason you decided to plant St. Augustine was because the area was somewhat shaded and you heard that St. Augustine is the best grass for shade. However, if you've been a regular reader of this column, you may remember that I've always advised that before you sod you try a tray or two of St. Augustine plugs in the area in question. If the plugs take off and grow, then plant more plugs. If the plugs don't grow, it's just too shady there to grow grass. Plugs are a lot more forgiving than is sod, especially in a shaded area. It is very easy to underwater sod. But it is also very easy to over-water sod in a shaded area, especially when the weather is cloudy and we're receiving lots of rain. You may have been told to spray a fungicide, but the real problem is a matter of inadequate sunlight and too much moisture, not a problem of diseased sod.

Probably the best choice of St. Augustine types for shade is Seville. Bitter Blue, another type long known for its shade tolerance, is also a good choice. But turf experts tell me that there's a lot of turf mistakenly sold as Bitter Blue that may actually be other types of St. Augustine. That's because it's not that easy to distinguish Bitter Blue from other types of St. Augustine when it is cut. Palmetto is yet another commonly sold type of St. Augustine. But Palmetto is so relatively new that we can't truly say how shade-tolerant it is.

If you would like more information on diagnosing your lawn problems, use our lawn problem chart at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/lawnchart2.pdf>.

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