

## **Blame mismanagement for dead areas in lawn**

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North Florida lawns are showing signs of problems again this spring. Though it is easy to blame those dead areas on our weather and sandy soils, the major cause is closer to home.

The extension service diagnoses hundreds of lawn problems each year and, with few exceptions, most problems are caused directly or indirectly by mismanagement. This results in a slow weakening of the grass, making it more susceptible to weather extremes, diseases and other pests.

Following are the most common errors made in managing turfgrass:

- Excessive applications of fertilizer that cause extremely lush growth that is more susceptible to pest problems. On very sandy soils, several light applications spaced several weeks apart are recommended instead of a single heavy application.
- Daily watering that causes a shallow root system and allows fungus diseases to thrive. Water infrequently, but deeply. This encourages a stronger root system and less opportunity for infection by disease organisms.
- An extremely low mowing height that slowly starves the lawn by not allowing enough leaf surface to manufacture food. Though low mowing yields a neater appearance, the result is stressed grass with a shallow root system that soon thins out and becomes weed-infested.
- Using a fertilizer that contains high nitrogen and very little potassium creates an imbalance in the soil and weakened turf. Current recommendations call for a fertilizer with 1-0-1 or 2-1-2 ratio such as 15-0-15, 15-5-15, or similar analysis. Potassium, which is the last number on the fertilizer bag, is frequently low in area lawns.
- Fertilizing in the fall with a high nitrogen fertilizer that contains low levels of potassium can contribute to winter injury. Signs of winter injury are generally not seen until the following spring. Fertilization of centipede grass should not be done later than August in North Florida. Fertilization of St. Augustine should be done no later than September.

### Q&A

Q. I saw two adult mole crickets in my lawn. Is it time to apply an insecticide for control?

A. Mole crickets seen in the spring are over-wintering adults. They leave the ground at this time of year, fly, mate and disperse to lay their eggs.

Treatment at this time of year is not advised. If it is warranted, wait until late June or early July to apply an insecticide.

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