

## Gray Leaf Spot Causing Problems in St. Augustine Grass Lawns



*Photo to be credited to University of Florida IFAS Extension : The classic symptoms of gray leaf spot disease on St. Augustine grass leaf blades are circular to oblong spots that are tan to brown colored with distinctive dark brown margins.*

David W. Marshall directs environmental education programs for the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County .  
<http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>

June 27, 2004

If you have a St. Augustine grass lawn, you may be having some problems with it now that the rainfall has been so frequent. Gray leaf spot, a fungus disease, is the most likely culprit.

The first symptoms you are likely to notice with gray leaf spot is that the lawn becomes thinner in certain areas. Closer examination will reveal withered, brown grass leaves in these thin areas. However, if you examine the grass a bit closer, especially in areas that aren't so severely affected, you will see the individual leaf spots that are the true beginning stages of the disease. Initial symptoms include small pinhead size spots that are olive-green to brown in color. These enlarge and form circular to oblong spots that are tan to brown colored with distinctive dark brown margins.

When you see the thin areas in the lawn caused by gray leaf spot, your natural inclination is to apply fertilizer. But, that's one of the worst things you can do unless your lawn truly needs the nutrients. Excess nitrogen will exacerbate the disease. If you haven't fertilized your lawn at all this spring and you want to fertilize now, use a fertilizer that has at least half of its nitrogen in a slow-release form. The fertilizer also should contain equivalent amounts of nitrogen and potassium, the first and last numbers in the fertilizer analysis. 15-0-15, with 7.5% slow-release nitrogen, is a good general purpose fertilizer unless you've had a soil test that indicates your lawn is one of the rare ones that also needs more phosphorus, the middle number in the analysis. Apply the 15-0-15 at a rate no greater than 6 pounds per 1,000 square feet of lawn area. A light rate of 3-4 pounds per 1,000 square feet may be even better for now while we're having such frequent rains.

If the soil in your lawn has compacted areas, for example from frequent foot traffic, alleviate the compaction through mechanical aeration and/or reduce traffic in those areas. This will help the grass to grow better and be less severely affected by gray leaf spot disease. Also, keep the blades of your lawn mower sharp so that they will not shred the ends of the grass blades and stress the grass. When you mow your lawn, try to mow the areas affected by the fungus disease last, so that you lessen the spread of the fungus to other areas.

If the thinning of the lawn has started to become noticeable, you may wish to make some fungicide applications to reduce further spread of the disease. Fungicides should contain one of the following active

## Gray Leaf Spot Causing Problems in

ingredients: azoxystrobin, chlorothalonil, thiophanate methyl, or trifloxystrobin. Scotts Lawn Fungus Control is an example of a product that contains thiophanate-methyl. Chlorothalonil-containing products are more difficult to find now because of recent label changes which prohibit further labeling of such products for home lawns. But several fungicides, such as Fertilome Liquid Fungicide, still contain chlorothalonil with directions for use on home lawns and stores are allowed to sell them until existing supplies are gone.

Carefully follow the fungicide label directions for use on home lawns. Do not use products that don't give directions for use on home lawns. The label will also tell you how soon you need to make a followup application. This is important, because one fungicide application is not likely to take care of the problem. Most fungicides work primarily in preventing fungus spread rather than in curing already infected plants.

###