

Lawn Problems May Not Have Simple Solutions



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: The frequent summer rains have contributed to lawn problems this summer, especially in shaded areas.

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On our University of Florida IFAS Extension website for Leon County is a page about late summer lawn problems, http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/late_summer_lawn_problems.htm I've noticed that the page has had many visitors recently. That's no surprise, as lawn problems are always common. But this summer's problems are primarily related to the frequent rains keeping the lawns so moist and humid, creating an ideal environment for fungus diseases, especially in St. Augustine grass lawns.

Unfortunately, there's nothing we can do to stop the rains. And, if we did, then we would be complaining about not having enough rain. So, we're better off putting our time and energy into focusing on some lawn care practices we can change.

First, keep your lawn mowed regularly. For most lawns, this means at least once a week. Second, don't mow the lawn when it's wet. I know that's not always easy, but if fungus diseases are present, mowing when the lawn is wet will more readily spread the fungus. Third, sharpen the mower blade at least once a month. More frequently is even better, because if the blade is not sharp, it tears the grass leaves rather than cutting them cleanly. So you may mow your St. Augustine grass lawn at the recommended three or four inch height. But if the grass leaves are torn an additional half inch, the effects are similar to mowing the lawn at an even lower height. The bottom line is that it's just an additional stress to the grass.

Speaking of stresses to the grass, inadequate sunlight is the most common stress most of our lawns face. Most

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of us have shaded spots where the lawn may grow marginally well much of the year. But when it's too wet and the skies are often cloudy, the lawn in these shaded spots starts thinning. There's no solution to this problem other than to accept it. Many of our lawn problems could be solved if we would just accept the fact that we don't have enough sunlight in some spots to grow an acceptable lawn there. Find an alternative solution such as just letting the natural leaf mulch from the trees serve as the groundcover there.

What about fertilizing the lawn now? If it hasn't been fertilized since spring and it's not looking that great, you may fertilize late this month with a 15-0-15 fertilizer. Use no more than six pounds per thousand square feet and apply it with a cyclone or rotary type lawn fertilizer spreader. Select a 15-0-15 with approximately 7.5% slow-release nitrogen. This is half of the total nitrogen. If you want to wait until September to fertilize, you may consider using one of the lower-nitrogen winterizer fertilizers, such as 5-0-15 or 5-0-20.

And finally, what about applying a fungicide to the lawn? If your lawn is developing areas that yellow and then turn brown, and you don't see any insect pests, examine the grass blades to see if they appear to be rotting off where they're attached to the stem. If they are, then it's a good possibility that the lawn has a fungus disease.

Possible lawn fungicides to use include those having the active ingredients chlorothalonil, propiconazole, triadimefon, myclobutanil, or thiophanate-methyl. Generally, liquid fungicides seem to work better, but you must have the appropriate sprayer to apply them correctly. Some locally available liquid fungicides containing chlorothalonil include ProLine Rescue Multi-Purpose Fungicide; Hi-Yield Daconil Lawn, Vegetable, and Flower Fungicide; and Fertilome Broad Spectrum Lawn and Garden Fungicide. Fertilome Liquid Systemic Fungicide contains propiconazole. Spectracide Immunox Multi-Purpose Fungicide contains myclobutanil. Scotts Lawn Fungus Control, containing thiophanate-methyl, and Bayer Advanced Lawn Fungus Control, containing triadimefon, are granular fungicides.

Follow the directions on the fungicide label carefully. Repeat applications will be necessary.

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