

Lawns Slowly Awaken Again This Spring



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Focus on the many colorful plants of spring, such as this Florida flame azalea, while you give your lawn time to wake up from winter.

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Every year about this time, many of you start worrying about your lawn. Why hasn't it greened up? And what are those dead spots in it? And every year about this time I advise you to just be patient. This year is no different.

Though we have had some abnormally hot days for so early in the spring, generally the nights have still been cool. So, it is perfectly normal that most lawns still have some areas that haven't completely greened up. I don't even recommend that you fertilize the lawn yet. Nor have most lawns needed irrigation yet either. If you still have dead spots in the lawn in late April, then it may be time to start planting some new plugs of grass.

So what caused those dead spots? They could be caused by a number of factors. My fellow UF-IFAS Extension Agent, Theresa Friday, over in Santa Rosa County, has a good article in our recent edition of the "Gardening in the Panhandle" newsletter. You can read it by going to our website, <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu> and finding the newsletter link at the top left of the page. In fact, if you would like to be notified when each new edition of the newsletter comes out, or when other helpful Extension information is released, click on the "Subscribe" button at the top left of the page and sign up. It's all free.

As Theresa says, “One of the most common springtime lawn problems is “dead spot”. Spring dead spots can be caused by several factors and are very difficult to diagnose correctly. The cause for spring dead spots is, in all probability, something that happened several months ago.”

Some of the possible causes could be fertilizing too late last fall, pest problems late last season, or improper cultural practices in the past. Over-fertilizing, over-watering, or mowing too low or too infrequently all can be factors. But the point is that the problem occurred in the past. There aren't any pest problems active now. So don't rush out to buy a pesticide or call your lawn service company. Trying too hard may have been a factor in your lawn problems in the first place.

Theresa goes on to say, “Regardless of the cause of the spring dead spots, lawns are slow to recover in the spring. Even though the day temperatures are warming, the night temperatures are keeping the soil temperature cool. The cool soil temperature keeps root growth slowed which, of course, slows shoot growth. Cooler soil temperature also affects the availability of nutrients. Centipedegrass that is yellow may be caused by an unavailability of iron due to low soil temperatures.”

“Rather than worrying about what chemical to apply to your spring dead spot, relax. Centipedegrass comes out of dormancy slowly and usually not uniformly.”

So rather than worry about the lawn, check out the newsletter I mentioned earlier. I have my usual article in it on “Seasonal Color in the Garden”. Consider spending some time planting something colorful in your landscape now. There will be time enough later to worry about the lawn, if you even still need to.

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