For years, I've heard the saying, "At ease disease; there's a fungus among us." Out of curiosity, I tried researching the origin of that saying. I came up with nothing. My conclusion is it has no meaning. The words simply rhyme and sound funny when spoken.

Conversely, in the real world, there is nothing funny about fungus. The fact is, for the past month or so, I've fielded question after question from homeowners all resonating the same concern. "I have fungus in my lawn. How do I get rid of it?" Such a concern is far from humorous.

Today, my goal is to share with you, the reader, what I've shared with these frustrated individuals.

It is first important to understand the significance of fungus. Fungi, the plural for fungus, can be defined as either single or multicellular living organisms found in just about any habitat, but mostly in the soil. Many are beneficial and what I call decomposers. They feed on dead organic material within the soil releasing carbon and other essential elements to the soil. Unfortunately, some fungi are pathogenic (disease causing). They are known to invade living plant life as well as animals and humans. Fungal diseases found living in plants are often referred to as blight, mildew, rust, scab, and cankers. When fungus attacks living turf grass, dead spots appear throughout the lawn, and most homeowners become frustrated.

When asked how to rid their lawn of fungus, most homeowners immediately want to know what fungicide they should use. I usually tell them they could use a fungicide if they so desired; however, more than likely using a fungicide will make them feel better but do little to stop the disease. Interestingly, most turf grass fungal problems are better addressed by preventive measures rather than curative measures. Also, since there are a number of different specific fungal diseases that can attack turf grass, there is no one fungicide that works successfully on all pathogens. Knowing the specific disease aids in determining which fungicide to use. I am not a plant pathologist; therefore, I cannot identify a specific disease attacking a lawn. I often suggest a specimen be sent to the UNL Plant Diagnostic Lab for a positive identification. Even then, attempting to cure

the problem with the proper fungicide is mostly futile and most certainly expensive.

For fungal diseases to prosper in turf grass, three things must come together, all at the exact time. The pathogen must be present, the susceptible host plant must be present and the proper environmental conditions must be present. Unfortunately, once turf grass is attacked by a fungal disease, that same disease will likely reoccur in the future. The reasons are the soil already contains the pathogen and the turf grass remains always susceptible. If and when ideal environmental conditions return, the disease will likely reoccur.

The advice I've been giving these frustrated homeowners is that they should wait until now to address their problem. Late summer and early fall is the opportune time to minimize future fungal problems in the lawn.

The best line of defense to this situation is diversification. One needs to introduce new cultivars of grass seed to the lawn. For example, if one's lawn is entirely bluegrass, introducing new cultivars of bluegrass seed launches diversification. Most new grass seed has been bred with stronger disease resistant qualities. When a lawn is no longer a monoculture (one cultivar of grass species) but diversified, it is less apt to be infected in the future, or if it does become diseased, it will likely do so with a less damage.

Now, late summer and early fall is the perfect time to overseed blighted fungal areas in the lawn. Autumn provides the ideal conditions for seeding lawns: cool air temperatures, warm soil and adequate precipitation. Next week I will share more on recommended procedures for overseeding an existing lawn.

In closing, why were blight and mildew invited to the party? Answer: Because they are fungi's. Get it? Fun guys! Okay, I agree, there is still nothing funny about fungus.