

Lawn Diseases

Our lawns tend to look a lot better in the spring and in the fall, at least in Nebraska. It is during the hot and dry summers that the stress really starts to take hold in turfgrasses. Currently in our landscapes we are seeing the whole gamut of problems. We are seeing four diseases including dollar spot, brown patch, summer patch, and rust.

Dollar spot is a common disease in many lawns that we tend to see most years. Dollar spot is, as its name implies, a disease that looks like brown spots throughout your lawn that are about the size of a silver dollar. It is a fungal disease that shows up most often in weather with warm days and cool nights with high humidity. There are distinct markings on the leaf blades for this disease that look like light brown spots across the entire blade which have a reddish-brown edge to the spot. Dollar spot can be prevented by keeping your turf healthy, well-watered, and by following the fertilizer recommendations for your turf species. Fungicides are not usually used on home lawns.

Brown patch is another fungal turf disease showing up in our lawns right now, especially in tall fescue. This disease often shows up in lawns that were overwatered or were fertilized heavily in the summer months. This disease shows up as brown patches in an otherwise green lawn. Upon closer investigation, you may notice that the leaves may have long tan-colored spots that are surrounded by a dark brown margin. You can avoid this disease by avoiding over-irrigation and over-fertilization of the lawn.

Summer patch is also showing up in our lawns right now. This fungal disease also leaves brown patches in your lawn, but usually they are in a circular pattern with an area of green turfgrass in the center. The leaves do not have a distinct marking on them. The best control for summer patch is to follow fertilization and watering requirements to reduce the stress to your lawn.

Rust is another disease that most people should be familiar with, especially if they have ever seen it in their lawns. You will know if you have rust in your lawn if you walk through it with white shoes or socks on and come out with orange coloration on the white spots of your shoes or

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socks. Rust is most common during hot and dry periods of the summer when the grass is growing fairly slow. This is another disease that you just need to deal with for the most part. It will usually go away in the fall when we fertilize our lawns.

The diseases that we see in our lawns this time of the year are mostly environmental. You can help to reduce the incidence of these diseases if you take good care of your lawns. Keeping the lawn mowed high, doing fertilizer applications at the correct times of the year, and keeping it watered enough, but not too much will all help to keep your turf healthy and able to compete with the diseases. Remember, fertilization should only occur on Arbor Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Halloween and not in the summer months, even if you miss one of the other applications.

The information for this article came from the book “Integrated Turfgrass Management for the Northern Great Plains” by the UNL Turfgrass Science Team.

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