

# FACT SHEET

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## CONTROL DISEASES IN THE HOME LAWN

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Disease prevention is an important key to successful maintenance of a uniform, green living carpet around the home. The "green thumb gardener," who understands plant language and responds to symptoms before a problem develops, holds a prerequisite to efficient disease control. Most disease control chemicals act as protectants and prevent infection from microorganisms that enter plant tissue causing disease. The following description helps early recognition and treatment of potential problems.

### Brown Patch

Brown patch disease, caused by a fungus (*Rhizoctonia solani*), occurs in the late spring or early fall. The disease is characterized by circular patterns of dead grass blades in the turf. These range from 1 to 50 feet in diameter. Blades and sheaths are pulled easily from the stolons because of deterioration in the attachment area. Stolons often remain green. New leaves may emerge in the center of the circular patch in 2 or 3 weeks, giving the diseased area a doughnut shaped appearance. The entire spot eventually may become green during a long growing season.

St. Augustine grass is damaged more by brown patch than bermudagrass or zoysiagrass. Disease development occurs most rapidly in temperatures between 75 and 85 degrees F. when free moisture is present. Fungus activity stops when the air temperature reaches 90 degrees. This explains seasonal development.

Some lawns are affected almost every year, while others are damaged only occasionally. Fungicide application, which effectively prevents brown patch development, should be made when brown patch is expected. On lawns where brown patch occurs occasionally, apply fungicide when the disease first appears. See fungicide chart for specific recommendations.

### Gray Leaf Spot

Gray leaf spot causes irregular brown to gray spots on leaf blades of St. Augustine grass. This

disease, caused by a fungus, develops rapidly with abundant moisture and warm temperatures. It is usually noticed first in shaded areas that remain damp for some time. In areas of heavy disease development, the grass may have a burned or scorched appearance resulting from death or spotting of the leaf blades. Lesions also occur on stems and spikes of affected plants.

Disease severity is enhanced by excessive nitrogen fertilizer on certain types of St. Augustine grass. Newly-sprigged or rapidly-growing grass is more susceptible than well established grass.

Control is best accomplished by avoiding excessive nitrogen fertilization. Water during the day, so that foliage will not remain wet overnight. Most turf fungicides control this disease effectively when used at 10-day intervals during periods favorable for infection. (See fungicide chart.)

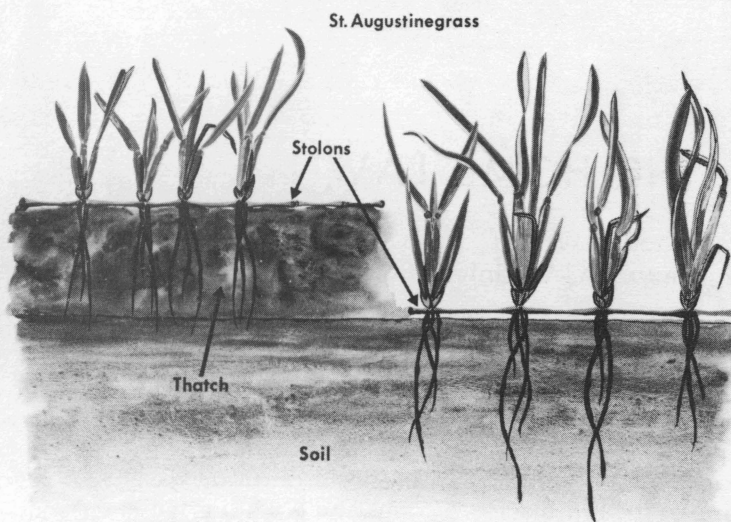
### Helminthosporium Leaf Spot; Root Rot of Bermudagrass

Symptoms of this fungal disease appear as irregular patches, ranging in size from 2 to several feet in diameter. Infections on leaves appear as small, olive green spots which enlarge to form dark blotches. Infected leaves die and fade to a light tan color. The entire plant is killed when the root rot phase of this disease develops.

The disease-causing fungus overwinters in thatch at the base of the plant and acts as a pathogen when weather conditions favor its development during the growing season. Chemical fungicides are effective in control. Apply at 7 to 14-day intervals during periods that favor disease development. See the fungicide chart for specific recommendations.

### Fading-out

Fading-out is a serious problem in many lawns where the grass thins and becomes unsightly. This condition develops more rapidly during the summer when large dead areas appear in the turf. A fungus (*Curvularia* spp.) can be cultured from stolons of diseased grass, but reproducing infections on healthy grass is difficult. For this reason,



Thatch, resulting from leaf clippings and dead stolons, may accumulate in thick layers resulting in poor root development and inefficient water penetration. Leaves and roots are produced at nodes on surface of stolons, and these roots must penetrate thatch before reaching soil, making them highly susceptible to drought.

it is believed this fungus causes fading-out on grass weakened by other disease-causing organisms, insect pests or nematodes.

Effective control of fading-out requires several different approaches. First, correct cultural conditions that limit plant growth. Mowing at the proper height, fertilizing according to soil test, watering properly and avoiding thatch build-up all contribute to healthy grass that resists development of weak pathogens.

Accumulations of fallen clippings and dead leaves, commonly referred to as "thatch," provide an environment favorable for microorganism build-up (see drawing). In fact, activity of these organisms is necessary for converting this material into humus. Some types become overambitious, however, and begin deriving nourishment from living grass plants, resulting in the fading-out condition. These areas sometimes are difficult to resod where grass has died.

Thatch build-up can be prevented by catching grass clippings or by removing leaf accumulations by close mowing and raking just before spring growth begins. Follow with regular mowings which remove only short clippings that dehydrate rapidly and do not contribute to thatch build-up.

Fungicide applications hasten recovery of affected turf. However, use in combination with good cultural practices.

### Fairy Rings

Mushrooms in a circle or semi-circle are called "fairy rings." According to ancient mythology, these result from fairies sowing seed as they dance in circles. In truth, however, these mushrooms are fruiting structures of fungi, produced when weather conditions are favorable. Mushroom-producing fungi develop an organic matter in the soil and produce fruiting structures on the outer limits of the colony, causing a circular effect. Grass is often greener in the ring area because of available nutrients liberated by decomposition of the fungus. Grass in the center of the ring may be declining because of fungus activity.

Control often is not necessary because of the condition's temporary nature. In other cases, however, the affected grass may decline rapidly if corrective steps are not taken. In such cases, aerate the soil by punching holes 6 to 8 inches deep at regular intervals. Apply a fungicide drench at a strength 2 or 3 times stronger than the normal recommendation.

### Dollar Spot — Small Brown Patch

Dollar spot of turfgrass is caused by the fungus *Sclerotinia homeocarpa*. The disease appears as round, brown or bleached spots the size of a silver dollar or slightly larger. Lesions may be seen on the edges of leaf blades. These cause death of leaf tips. During disease activity, fungal growth, appearing like fine cobweb growth, may be present on leaf blades in early morning dew. This disease can occur any time during the year but it is most prevalent in late spring or early fall along with hot humid days and cool nights. Improved bermudagrass, zoysia and bahiagrass are the most severely affected grasses grown in Texas.

Control is accomplished by applying adequate nitrogen and spraying with a turf fungicide if the disease occurs (see fungicide chart).

### Pythium Blight

Pythium blight (cottony blight) is caused by the fungus *Pythium aphanidermatum* and affects improved bermuda grasses. Infected grass rapidly dies in spots or streaks. In early stages of infection, the affected grass appears water-soaked, soft and slimy and exhibits a greasy appearance. At times the affected spots may have a "cottony" appearance due to the abundant fungal growth. The disease occurs during warm, humid weather in poorly drained areas. Fungicides are effective in control. A 7 to 14 day spray schedule should be followed during periods favoring disease development.

### Slime Molds

Slime molds are fungi which develop mostly during warm, moist weather. The most common



slime mold (*Physarum cinereum*) found on turf-grass occurs as a dark gray to black crust-like material. The soot-type material rubs off easily on shoes or clothing.

Slime molds derive nourishment from decaying organic matter in or on the soil. Under certain conditions, they move upward on sticks, stones, grass blades, etc., to produce spores. They do not feed on green plants and cause no damage other than shading. Remove from lawn grass by applying water under pressure with a water hose or by brushing with a broom.

### **Smut**

Smuted bermudagrass seed heads are a nuisance when the black spores rub off on shoes and clothing. These occur when the plants are systemically infected with smut fungus (*Ustilago cynodontis*).

Conventional fungicides do not prevent this condition, because they are protective and do not enter plant parts. Since this disease is more of a nuisance than a threat to turf health, control usually is directed toward preventing seed head development. Adequate watering and fertilization helps prevent seed head development which occurs under stress conditions. Close mowing may remove seed heads when produced.

### **Rust**

Rust, a fungal disease (*Puccinia* spp.), is most damaging during mild, warm weather. Plants affected with rust have a chlorotic appearance, and stands may begin to thin. Orange colored linear pustules or raised bumps are evident on leaf blades. These vary in appearance, depending on the species involved. Pustules are difficult to see on affected St. Augustine grass unless the blades are examined with a hand lens. Zoysiagrass is affected more than either St. Augustine or bermudagrass. Rust diseases can be controlled by using fungicides. (See fungicide chart.)

### **Nematodes**

Nematode injury symptoms often appear as areas of low fertility, even where fertilizers have been applied. This occurs when nematodes feeding on roots reduce their ability to absorb water and nutrients. These tiny roundworms which measure about 1/50 of an inch long have a spear in their mouth part that punctures plant cells and withdraws cell sap. This activity not only removes cell contents but opens points of entry for other organisms that infect injured or devitalized roots.

Identify nematode problems positively before taking corrective action with chemicals. The Plant Nematode Detection Laboratory located at College Station analyzes soil samples for the presence of

nematodes. Growers can obtain information sheets, bags and mailing cartons from the county Extension agent's office.

Materials suggested for chemical control of nematodes are Nemagon, Fumazone and VC-13. The first two materials mentioned often come in large containers, thus it may be desirable to obtain the services of a commercial applicator. The third material, a phosphate insecticide, must be worked into the soil well since diffusion is slow. Granular-type nematocides, such as Nematode-Killer and Nema-X, are available. These are effective if a means of working them into the soil is devised.

Where nematodes constitute the limiting growth factor, a nematocide application usually is needed yearly. Nematodes are seldom completely eliminated from the soil, but their populations can be reduced to allow normal plant growth. Good cultural and fertilization practices also help overcome nematode injury.

### **Iron Chlorosis**

Iron chlorosis results from iron deficiency in the soil. Iron may not be available because of an alkaline soil reaction, changing the element to a form unsuitable for the plant. This condition is corrected by applying iron sulfate (cuprous) or iron chelates (see chart).

This condition is typified by yellowing of the foliage. Often green and yellow streaks intermingle. In extreme conditions, the leaves are solid yellow.

### **Virus**

A virus condition of St. Augustine grass has been identified which causes a chlorotic mottle of the leaf blades. Affected grass is unthrifty and thins



Fairy rings

badly. Spread and control of this condition is currently under investigation.

### Other Problem Causes

**Soil compaction**—Certain soils are compacted easily, especially in areas of heavy foot traffic. This condition prevents adequate penetration of moisture and nutrients and restricts root system growth.

Several types of aerifiers correct this condition.

**Dog urine injury**—Circular spots 8 to 10 inches in diameter may appear in areas frequented by female dogs. Heavy watering helps correct this condition.

**Fertilizer burn**—Commercial fertilizers are salts and can burn grass when applied excessively. This condition is most often seen where fertilizers were spilled.

**Excessive shading**—Most lawn grasses require rather high light intensities. When a lawn is fertilized, this in turn stimulates growth of shrubs and trees that shade the grass. Selective pruning of trees and shrubs helps correct this condition.

**Sun scald**—Clipping grass too closely removes foliage necessary for food manufacturing and exposes stolons to direct sun rays. When this occurs, a brown lesion or burned area is found on the upper surface of the stolon. Avoid mowing too closely.

**Improper fertilization**—Excessive use of an individual element, such as nitrogen, makes plants more susceptible to disease attack. Avoid this problem by fertilizing according to soil test recommendations.

**Shock**—Allowing grass to become too tall before mowing causes grass to experience shock and lose vigor. Mow frequently to prevent this condition.

**Permanent wilt**—Grass allowed to become too dry may pass the permanent wilt stage where recovery is not possible. This may occur where water does not penetrate because of compaction.

### Fungicide, Nematocide Recommendations

Use fungicides and nematocides to protect turf during periods favoring disease development. Their use should supplement good cultural practices. Fungicides and nematocides are capable of inhibiting or killing certain types of microorganisms on plants or in the soil.

No chemical kills all undesirable organisms and spares all desirables. Disease control chemicals should be used only when needed. The following chart suggests materials found most effective against specific disease causing organisms.

### Selected References

1. Cole, Herbert and Houston Couch, 1963, Control Turfgrass Diseases — Circular 510, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park Pennsylvania.
2. Freeman, T. E., 1967, Diseases of Southern Turfgrasses — Tech. Bulletin 713, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.
3. Gould, Charles J., 1967, Use of Fungicides in Controlling Turfgrass Diseases. Reprint of The Golf Course Superintendent (Sept./Oct. 1966-January 1967).

MATERIALS FOR DISEASE CONTROL

Chemical	Trade name and formulations	Brown Patch	Helminthosporium	Grey Leaf Spot	Dollar Spot	Pythium Blight	Rust	Fading-Out	Nema-todes	Iron Chlorosis
Benomyl	Tersan 1991 (WP)	X				X		X		
Chloroneb	Tersan SP (WP)					X				
PCNB	Terraclor (L,G,WP)	X					X	X		
Maneb and coordinated zinc ion	Fore (WP)	X	X							
Thiram	Thylate (WP)							X		
Captan				X				X		
Cycloheximide + PCNB	Acti-dione (WP) RZ	X					X			
Daconil	Daconil 2787 (WP)		X	X	X					
Dexon	Dexon (WP)					X				
Dyrene	Dyrene (WP)		X	X	X					
Koban	Koban (WP)					X				
DBCP	Nemagon (L)								X	
	Fumazone (L)								X	
	Oxy-BBC-12 (L)								X	
	Nema-X (G)								X	
	Nema-Kill (G)								X	
	VC-13 (L)								X	
VC-13	VC-13 (L)								X	
Iron Sulfate	Copperas (WP)									X
Iron Chelates	(Several)(L or WP)									X

The product (s) mentioned herein does not guarantee nor warrant the standard of the product, nor does it imply approval of the product to the exclusion of others which may be equally suitable.  
USE ALL PESTICIDES ACCORDING TO LABEL DIRECTIONS

Note:  
 L—Liquid  
 G—Granule  
 WP—Wettable powder