

Brown patch is occurring early in some lawns this year

Q. Brown circular areas are showing up in my lawn. Is this a fungus and if so how do I control it?

A. This may be a common lawn disease called brown patch/large patch, caused by the fungus *Rhizoctonia*.

This patch disease usually appears as circular brown areas in lawns during the milder weather of fall and spring. But this year it seems to be occurring a little early. These circular patches sometimes grow together, forming irregular dead areas with borders resembling portions of circles.

Patches can be several feet across but usually begin as small spots only a few inches to a foot across. The fungus is most active along the border of the patch expanding into healthy surrounding grass. Along the margin, the grass blades turn yellow and then brown. Eventually, as the patch expands, it may take on a "doughnut pattern" with the grass recovering in the center of the circle. In shady, moist areas a circular pattern may not occur.

Using your index finger and thumb to pull upwards on a yellow infected leaf will result in the blade easily coming loose from the plant, revealing a tan to brown rotted leaf base. This technique is used to confirm brown patch as the problem.

A number of fungicides are labeled to control brown patch. But because there are critical factors involved with achieving control, I suggest taking time to read the online UF/IFAS publication on brown patch, available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH044>. Or contact your local UF/IFAS Extension Office or a Pest Control Operator before attempting chemical control of this disease.

A fungicide only prevents the disease from expanding. It may be next spring as the grass resumes growth before the diseased areas fill in.

In addition to chemical control, follow good lawn management practices. Avoid fertilizing after September, particularly with high nitrogen fertilizers. Too much nitrogen can promote brown patch. Our lawns need a balanced fertilizer containing equivalent amounts of nitrogen and potassium, preferably in a slow-release form. Irrigate only when necessary and do so during early morning hours (between 2 and 8 AM). Since mowers can spread this disease, mow diseased areas last.

Plant Clinic

A Plant Clinic to diagnose lawn, landscape and garden problems will be held tomorrow, September 24 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Fort Walton Beach at the Okaloosa County Extension building, 127 W. Hollywood Blvd.

To participate, bring a fresh sample of the weed, plant, insect, etc., that you'd like diagnosed. This may include a plant stem with several leaves, a 4-inch square of grass with roots attached, etc.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, September 18, 2008