

## Thatch in lawns is misunderstood

**Q.** I have thatch in my St. Augustinegrass lawn. Can I burn this thatch out at the end of this growing cycle or the early spring? Raking seems to pull out too many of the runners.

**A.** Many times, what people are calling thatch is really not thatch – it is dead leaf blades on the soil surface. True thatch cannot easily be removed. It is a layer of dead and, in some cases, living plant debris (dead grass stems, runners and roots). It's a layer that builds up over time under the grass and above the soil. It forms a layer that looks somewhat like peat moss. Dead leaf blades simply breakdown too fast to form thatch. Grass blades are comprised of about 90% water. A brisk raking will remove dead grass blades, not thatch.

In order to remove thatch, you need to use a vertical mower (dethatcher). Or, some people will top dress the lawn to help more quickly breakdown the thatch. This is described in the below Web publication. If the thatch layer becomes too thick, it can cause some problems in a lawn. The Web publication explains this, also. Fertilizing too much or using too much nitrogen, watering too much and sometimes the overuse of fungicides are the main causes of a thatch problem. Basically, you're growing the grass faster than the microorganisms can breakdown the debris. If it's just grass leaves and not true thatch, I don't know that I'd worry about it too much. If you do need to use a vertical mower in St. Augustinegrass, only go in one direction and not in a checkerboard pattern. As far as burning the lawn, many municipalities do not allow burning and there is always the gamble of the fire getting out of control. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH029>

**Q.** Will it harm my centipedegrass if I overseed my new lawn with ryegrass seed?

**A.** It definitely does not benefit the centipedegrass. Ryegrass can compete with the permanent grass. I've seen a number of centipedegrass lawns that were weakened during spring green up, attempting to compete with the ryegrass. Extra fertilizer used to keep the ryegrass green and growing can also cause problems for centipedegrass, possibly inducing centipedegrass decline. There are pros and cons for overseeding. Most people overseed to produce a green lawn during winter. Personally, I'm ready to put my mower away for winter. And I take a break and my lawn takes a break. But this is personal preference. You'll have to make that decision. There is the possibility of causing some damage in your centipedegrass as a result of overseeding.

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