

Have patience with lawn this spring

Spring lawn problems are common in North Florida. If you are satisfied with your lawn this time of year, you are the exception. But patience, warmer soil temperature and correct lawn maintenance will improve many spring lawn problems.

Many spring dead spots in lawns are caused by something that happened the previous growing season or winter. For example, late applications of a high-nitrogen fertilizer can decrease winter survival. It's best to not fertilize after September. If you insist on fertilizing a warm season grass after September, it's best to use a low-nitrogen fertilizer.

A late infestation of insects or disease during fall many times goes unseen as the grass is beginning to go dormant. The following spring, as the lawn begins to green up, the evidence of a fall pest problem is clearly visible by brown, dead grass. The pest may not be present or active during spring.

Poor maintenance practices the previous growing season may be a factor involved with declining, thinning areas in the lawn during spring. Over watering, shallow watering (watering frequently for short periods), mowing too low, over fertilizing and herbicide injury the year before can result in poor lawn performance the following spring.

Regardless of the cause, problem areas within lawns are slow to recover in spring because of frequent cool night temperatures. These frequent cool nights keep the soil temperature or root zone cool.

Cool soil temperatures don't allow rapid root regeneration in spring, which inhibits lawn recovery. The cool soil also decreases availability of some needed nutrients to the growing grass blades. For example, the lack of iron under cool soil conditions is a common cause for yellow areas within lawns. The cool soil also decreases availability of phosphorus and potassium, which can result in reddish-purple grass blades intermingled throughout the yard. As soil temperature increases, availability of these nutrients improves and the yellow and purple areas turn green.

Have patience with your lawn and follow good maintenance practices this spring. Consistently warmer nights will allow soil temperatures to warm, which will improve turf root growth, nutrient availability and lawn recovery.

If your lawn has not made a comeback by late spring or early summer, it may be time to consider replanting those dead, declining areas. But whatever you do, don't continue to follow lawn maintenance practices that do not work in Florida and that contribute to your lawn's demise. Take some time to visit <http://yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu> to learn how to grow a Florida lawn.

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