

## **Spring dead spots common in lawns**

Spring dead spots in home lawns are a very common occurrence in our area. As a matter of fact, if you talk to an Extension Agent or Master Gardener that works in the area of horticulture anywhere in North Florida, they will tell you that they are overwhelmed by phone calls, walk in visits and emails from the public concerning spring lawn problems.

As these questions begin, a typical caller may say, "Last summer my lawn looked good; however, this spring I have dead areas in my yard." The caller may indicate that sections of their lawn "failed to green up" this spring. The caller may be very frustrated because their neighbor's lawn seems to look fine. The fact is that within a three to five year period most people will experience this sort of problem with their lawn in our area.

The main reason for so many lawn problems, in my opinion, is because we are attempting to do something that was not designed by nature. We are attempting to grow non-native grasses in an imperfect environment for turf and then expect the "perfect" lawn year after year. There are many causes for these spring dead spots. Determining the actual cause can be difficult and at times costly. There may be a combination of factors involved with spring dead spots (involving environmental conditions, pests and poor maintenance).

The cause or causes for spring dead spots usually can be traced back to something that happened the previous summer, fall or winter. Examples include: fertilizing too late in the summer or fall with a high-nitrogen fertilizer, suddenly discontinuing watering too soon during late summer or fall, cold weather damage during the winter, a turf disease or insect infestation during the late summer or fall, etc. In other words, the actual cause for the problem may be gone or has past and the damage is done.

The solution involves having a little patience to see what will recover as we move into warmer weather. Many years you will not see significant improvement in your lawn until the month of May.

Secondly, if little recovery is seen, you will need to replant the grass or look at alternatives to grass.

Thirdly, learn to follow proper maintenance practices including proper pest control to prevent the problem again.

And finally, be willing to accept a less than perfect lawn. Remember, we are trying to grow these grasses in a foreign environment not necessarily designed to grow the "perfect" lawn.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, March 31, 2011