

Gray leaf spot can be diagnosed at plant clinic

Gray leaf spot is a common fungal disease of St. Augustinegrass. Wet conditions promote this fungus. This includes high humidity, heavy dews and particularly frequent afternoon and evening rains.

The individual spots or lesions are first seen as tiny brownish spots smaller than a pinhead. As they become larger, they will be circular and then begin to elongate lengthwise along the leaf. The spots will become brown to grayish in appearance. Numerous spots or lesions may be found on an individual leaf. Heavily infected leaves begin to turn brown and wither, usually beginning at the tip of the blade.

We can help you diagnose gray leaf spot as well as many other lawn, landscape and garden diseases and problems at our monthly plant clinics. The next plant clinic will be held Thursday, July 21 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Fort Walton Beach at the Okaloosa County Extension building, 127 W. Hollywood Blvd.

If you have a plant problem that you'd like diagnosed, bring a sample of the weed, plant, insect, etc., to the clinic. Be sure to bring a fresh sample that represents what is seen in the landscape. This may include a plant stem with several leaves, a 4-inch square of grass with roots attached, etc. You may also bring a sample of your soil for pH testing.

Gray leaf spot can move rapidly during prolonged warm, wet periods. Over watering or irrigating in the evening provides the prolonged period of wetness required for disease infection. For more information on how to correctly water a Florida lawn, visit the attached website. http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Lawn_Watering

According to the Florida Lawn Handbook, "Severity of the disease is enhanced by application of readily available nitrogen fertilizer and is proportional to the amount of nitrogen applied." Be careful to not overdo it in fertilizing your lawn and do not apply a high nitrogen fertilizer on top of an already infected lawn. Also, some lawn weed killers such as atrazine will increase the susceptibility of the grass to gray leaf spot.

Select fertilizers that are low in nitrogen or that have slow release nitrogen. Irrigate during early morning hours to minimize the period in which the grass is wet and water only on an as needed basis, watering less often but deeply. Avoid frequent, shallow watering and don't irrigate when it is already wet from rain.

If the disease outbreak is severe, you may need to use a fungicide. Look for products containing propiconazole, triadimefon or thiophanate-methy. Always follow the product's label directions and precautions.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, July 14, 2011