Dry spots in lawn may lead you to plant clinic or plant sale

Many people wrongly blame pests (mole crickets, brown patch, etc.) for dry spots in their lawns.

Dry spots are the result of imperfections in an irrigation system. They’re revealed during extended dry weather. During times of adequate rainfall, rain masks the irrigation system’s imperfections.

A couple of simple tests can help confirm that the problem areas are to be blamed on lack of water versus some mysterious pest.

First, check affected areas by taking a soil sample in the root zone. Take a slice of soil with a shovel or trowel to a depth of six to eight inches. Visually inspect and feel the soil in the root area for moisture. Then do the same in an adjacent area of the lawn that looks normal and compare the difference. It should be obvious if there’s a difference in moisture between the areas tested.

The second test involves placing several empty straight-sided cans (such as soup or tuna cans) in the affected area and several in a normal area of the lawn. Then turn on irrigation system and let it run long enough to collect some water in the cans. Compare amounts of water collected in the two areas. Again, it should be obvious if there’s a difference in the quantity of water applied in the areas tested.

These tests are cheaper, less trouble and more environmentally friendly as compared to purchasing and applying pesticides for nonexistent pests. Many people treat for mole crickets, a disease or other lawn pests as a result of incorrectly diagnosing the problem.

If you’re not sure about your diagnosis, bring a fresh 4-inch square of grass with roots attached taken from the edge of the affected area to our Plant Clinic today from 9 a.m. to noon in Fort Walton Beach at the Okaloosa County Extension building, 127 W. Hollywood Blvd. The sample should be taken from the transition area (where the grass is beginning to die), including some dead and live grass.

Finally, if you’re dissatisfied with your lawn, you may want to replace part of it with appropriate plants other than lawngrass. One place to obtain such plants is at the Okaloosa County Master Gardeners’ Plant Sale.

This plant sale will take place Saturday, April 29, 8:00 am to noon at the Northwest Florida Fairgrounds in Fort Walton Beach.

They will have annuals, perennials, native plants, trees, wildflowers, bog plants and more.

Parking is good. The Master Gardeners will help answer your gardening questions and will even load your vehicle with all the plants you buy. You can’t beat that.