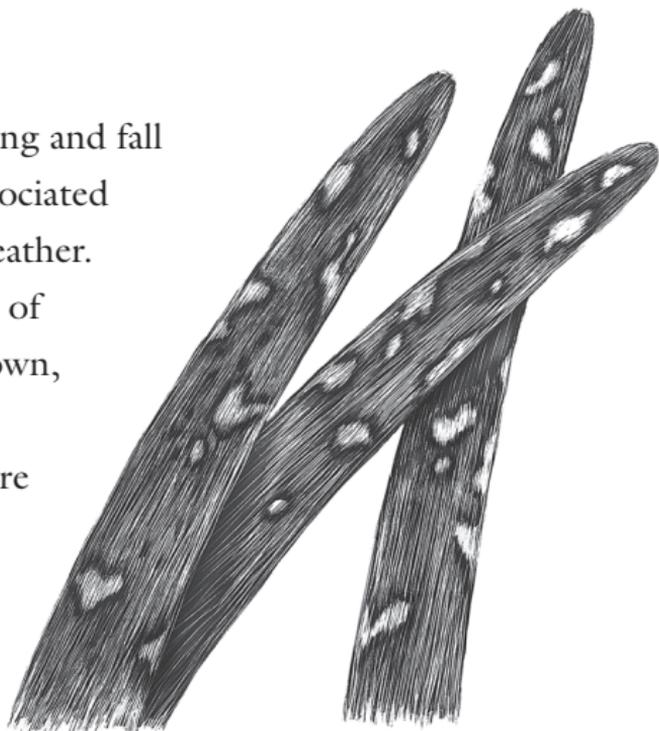


Lawn Diseases: Leaf Spot, Red Thread, Summer Patch, Snow Mold & Others

Leaf Spot

Leaf spot is a spring and fall fungal disease associated with wet, cool weather.

It creates patches of yellow, black, brown, or orange in the lawn. Under severe disease pressure it can attack the crown, the heart of the plant, causing



thinning. Bluegrass, the primary turf in sod lawns is the most susceptible and commonly affected, but leaf spot often appears on other grass varieties such as fine fescue, perennial rye and tall fescue.

Adding newer more disease-resistant varieties of grass when initially establishing a lawn or when overseeding is the best preventative approach. Mowing the lawn when it is dry and at the recommended 3" height also helps by keeping the disease from reaching the crown as can occur with shorter cuts.

There are many effective disease sprays that can help clean up leaf spot if applied in the month of May or June. Normally one spray arrests the spread under average conditions. However, grass type and weather play a large role in the timing of sprays and effective control.

Harmful Lawn Diseases

Red Thread

Red thread, or pink patch, is another fungal disease that is usually visible as small red or pink patches, especially in the morning or under wet conditions. As the grass dries, the affected leaf blades turn to a tan or bleached straw color. Red thread is most prevalent in grass that is under stress during warm, humid weather, from late spring until fall. Lawns with fine fescue or ryegrass are particularly susceptible to red thread.

Although red thread is not normally a seriously damaging disease, in severe cases damage can occur. Mowing when dry, overseeding in the fall with disease-resistant turf grasses and sufficient fertilization are effective ways to help prevent red thread disease. In the event of a severe outbreak, a spray application can break the cycle of infection.

Summer Patch & Brown Patch

Summer patch is a soil disease that often attacks sod containing bluegrass and fine fescue grasses. Characterized by visible circles and crescents, this summer disease can appear very quickly, resulting in yellowing and dead patches especially in sod with compaction and poor air circulation and/or drainage. Summer patch can be helped by regular aeration and a proper high mowing height of 3". Short mowing, below 2", is a sure way to place undue stress on a lawn and promote summer patch scarring. Preventative disease sprays are an option in the spring or fall if aeration and high mowing are unsuccessful.

Brown patch is a more widespread summer disease typically seen in tall fescue and perennial ryegrass. Noted for its often sudden, overnight appearance in hot humid weather, brown patch thins out sections of turf resulting in small to large blighted patches. It thrives in rainy, humid weather especially on lawns with succulent growth. Typically, a preventative or curative disease spray can be applied in July or August.

Both summer and brown patch can cause minor to significant turf damage in a short period of time. For those clients who value their sod or seeded lawn, and have irrigation or a landscaper that mows on a regular basis (often enhancing the damage by cutting too low), a few proactive sprays are worth the gained aesthetic value.

Pythium & Fusarium

Few diseases are as quick and lethal to turf grass as pythium and fusarium. Under the right conditions, lawns can collapse and die in one night. Especially susceptible are newly seeded lawns. Warm, wet conditions and standing water promote pythium and fusarium from May to August. Both diseases cause the grass to rot and collapse, giving the plant a visible ‘water-soaked’ appearance in the morning. Excessive amounts of mulch used in hydroseeding and too much soluble fertilizer can also contribute to the development of either disease. Fungicides are very effective around seeding time or when weather conditions favor an attack.

Snow Mold

Snow mold is a very common lawn disease that can develop in the spring, with or without snow cover. There are two types of snow mold in New England: pink and gray. The only significant differences between the two, beside their obvious color, is that pink snow mold is much more common and forms under snow while the gray variety seldom forms under melting snow.

Both pink and gray snow molds are a fungus that can grow well in the cool, damp temperatures of late winter to spring. They can infect many turf varieties but are most prevalent on fine fescue, rye, bluegrass and particularly on turf newly seeded the prior fall. Look for pink-tinted (or white) blighted/matted patches beginning in March, ranging from fist-sized to larger areas where smaller patches coalesce.

Harmful Lawn Diseases

Preventative sprays in late fall to early winter before snow falls can help minimize the damage, especially on susceptible turf. In general, healthy, clean and robust lawns can withstand snow mold disease and will not need a preventative spray. Fall cleanup of leaf debris and a pre-winter short mowing (just under 2") will provide some protection. If snow mold does occur, reduce the damage by lightly rake your lawn in the spring, allowing the ground in the blighted areas to warm up quicker so the grass can begin growing and recovering faster.

Other Lawn Diseases

There are many other lawn diseases such as dollar spot and powdery mildew. Powdery mildew usually occurs in lawn areas with poor air circulation and shade. Although not particularly damaging, the white fungal matter covering the leaves can reduce the ability to capture sunlight in an already difficult growing environment, not to mention the aesthetically displeasing white tint. Adding more light and increasing air circulation to the affected area will help combat powdery mildew.

If you believe your lawn has a disease or you would like to reduce the likelihood of an occurrence, be sure to contact us for more information.

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