



**UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA**

IFAS EXTENSION

Friday's Feature

By

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Patchy greenup of lawns is common in spring

As soon as the weather turns warm, the lawn questions start. The concerns vary from a few yellow areas to large brown areas that failed to turn green. The most frequent concern of gardeners this time of year is a "dead spot" in the lawn. Patches of dead grass in spring are common, can be caused by several factors and are very difficult to diagnosis correctly. Extensive grass loss through the winter is usually caused by something that happened several months ago.

Fertilizing too late in the year can result in a spring dead spot. An application of nitrogen in the fall will promote shoot growth, when the grass growth and metabolism should be slowing down. This late growth flush will deplete carbohydrate reserves, which are necessary to make the grass regrow the following spring. Late fall fertilization will also produce new, tender shoot growth that is less able to tolerate adverse conditions such as cold. Therefore, a late-season application of nitrogen is not recommended.

Many of our lawn pests are at their peak population late in the growing season. A fall infestation of insects or diseases can often go unnoticed because the grass is beginning to go dormant. In spring, the fall pest problem results in very visible brown dead patches. The problem pest may or may not be currently active. So, don't jump to conclusions and begin treating. If anything, mark the border of your dead spot with something like golf tees--something that you can push down into the grass and leave for a period of time. If the dead area creeps beyond your marked margin, then you do have an active problem and it needs to be diagnosed before an appropriate treatment can be started.

Poor cultural practices the previous growing season can also contribute to spring dead spots by weakening the turfgrass and making it more susceptible to cold damage. Overwatering, poor drainage, mowing too low and overfertilization are a few practices that will contribute to winter kill.

Remember, our warm-season turfgrasses are slow to recover in the spring. Even though the day temperatures are warming, the night temperatures are keeping the soil temperature cool.



Patchy greenup and yellow areas are common in centipedegrass in the early spring

The cool soil temperature doesn't allow rapid root regeneration in the spring, which inhibits top growth in your lawn. The cool soil also decreases the availability of some needed nutrients to the growing grass blades. For example, the unavailability of iron because of cool soil is a common cause for bright yellow areas within lawns, especially in centipedegrass. The cool soil also decreases the availability of phosphorus and potassium, which can result in individual reddish-purple grass blades intermingled through the yard. As the soil temperature increases, the availability of nutrients improves and the yellow and purple areas should turn green.

“Patchy greenup” is a term used to describe the typical look of a lawn as it begins to come out of dormancy. Centipedegrass comes out of dormancy slowly and usually not uniformly. Give your grass several more weeks before you give up on it. If it still is not doing well then do some repair work. Rake out the dead areas and either seed, sprig, plug or sod the damaged area.

In summary, be patient with your lawn. Warmer temperatures and correct cultural practices will result in improved growth. Consistently warmer nights will allow the soil temperature to warm, which will improve turf root growth, nutrient availability and lawn recovery.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>