Summer Lawn Issues

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Two years in a row we have had above average rainfall in the winter and spring followed by very dry, hot weather in the summer. The most common issue caused by such conditions is for the lawn to dry out but there are other conditions to consider as well, including chinch bugs, grubs and take-all-patch.

**Lawn drying** can be expressed in several ways depending on the soil situation, your sprinkler system, and the grass variety.

If you don’t water your lawn the grass will often brown evenly across the whole lawn with variation due to shade and soil depth. During dry weather, grass in the shade stays greener longer than the lawn grass in full sun. The complication with this statement, however, is that lawn grass stressed by too much shade is more likely to become sparser and sparser as the dry weather continues.

The deeper your soil, the longer the grass stays green. Deep soil provides a larger reservoir for stored moisture and for root development.

If you water the lawn but you still experience areas of browning it could be caused by uneven watering and or varying depths of soil. Zoysia grass is especially sensitive to such conditions which may be expressed as streaks or patches of brown surrounded by green.

The easiest way to confirm that the browning is caused by uneven watering or soil depth variations is to identify a test area and give it special hand watering every other day for a week to 10 days. If the test area greens up, the problem is lack of water caused by uneven water application or soil problems. Call in your irrigation contractor to fix uneven irrigation applications and consider adding compost and aeration this fall for soil problems.

If the test area does not green up with extra hand-watering, consider **chinch bugs**. Chinch bugs suck materials from the grass stems. They usually operate in the hottest part of the lawn just like drought damage. For thick infestations you can often see the small pests at the base of the stems by rubbing your hand through the grass. Treat them with one of the granular or liquid soil insecticides. The grass will recover in the fall when the temperatures cool.

**Grub damage** appears as scattered brown areas in the lushest part of the lawn. The damage may be expressed in smaller and browner patches than chinch bug symptoms. You may be able to pull up the grass in the brown patches like a toupee because the grubs eat the roots. The same products that control chinch bugs work on grubs but they work best to control grubs if they are applied in late May or early June before the damage is visible. At that point the grubs are small and actively feeding. Make a note on your calendar to treat them next year. Follow label instructions on the soil insecticide.

The most difficult problem to address is if the brown areas in your lawn are caused by **take-all-patch**. It is a fungus disease that weakens portions of the lawn in the spring. The diseased areas die in the hot part of the summer. Recognize the problem as take-all-patch if the brown areas are actually dead and don’t respond to the hand-watering test. The killed area usually has distinct rounded edges.

Treatment of take-all patch is slow and difficult. Fungicides do not work well. Apply a one inch deep layer of sphagnum peat moss over the diseased and adjacent areas. The idea is to acidify the soils where the fungus is operating. The take-all-patch fungus declines as the sphagnum peat moss releases acid.

For more information on these summer lawn issues visit plantanswers.com. The website also provides information on alternatives to lawn grass such as shade tolerant groundcovers and hardscape, options that reduce your workload and water bills.