Brown Patch and Lawn Fertilization and Oak Sprouts

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The fungal disease, brown patch, is infecting area lawns. Recognize the symptoms as growing brown patches where the grass blades are dying. The patch outer boundaries usually have rounded edges and there is usually some sprouts of green grass in the middle of the infection.

Brown patch is related to excess water and usually begins in a low spot in the lawn.

To prevent brown patch it is recommended that we discontinue or, at least, greatly reduce irrigation in the fall (right now!). If it does not rain for 2 weeks and you feel the lawn needs irrigation, water in the morning so the grass does not go into the evening with damp foliage.

In addition to trying to prevent brown patch infection, it is reasonable to discontinue the fall irrigation for several reasons. We have had lots of rain. The grass is now in a reduced growth mode because of shorter day length and cooler temperatures. It does not require as much water to prosper.

Reducing lawn irrigation usually results in stopping the spread of the infection centers, but if it doesn’t, lawn fungicides such as F-Stop, Terra-chlor and Fung Away will stop the growth of the infected areas. Follow the label instructions. Complete repair and regrowth may not occur until next spring.

In the long term use compost or a landscape mix to fill in and level low spots where the disease infections begin.

If your lawn is not infected with brown patch, the end of September or early October is the ideal time to fertilize the lawn. Use a “winterizer” formula with a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen to phosphorus to potassium. The formula 18-6-12 is readily available and effective.

The use of leftover slow-release lawn fertilizer is okay but the advantage of the “winterizer” formula is that the nitrogen source is fast release. Apply it at 1lb of nitrogen ( about 11 cups of fertilizer) per 1000 sq. ft. of lawn (which is usually the lowest setting on the applicator) to provide the nutrients required for winter hardiness and fast spring green-up. Use the leftover slow release lawn fertilizer from the spring for the flower and vegetable gardens.

Oak suckers are an issue in a number of lawns. They are sprouts that grow off of the shallow roots of a parent lawn tree. If left to grow unhindered they would make an oak thicket or oak motte. The suckers seem more likely to grow in soils that are shallow or compacted from trees that have reached the height that the root system is capable of supporting. In addition to the soil influence, some individual trees seem inclined to produce more suckers than neighboring trees in the same landscape.

Since the suckers are attached to the valuable parent tree, it is not advisable to try and control them with a herbicide. The best control remains to be cutting them with a lawn or string mower several times a year. The cutting of live oak suckers does not seem to be a problem in terms of oak wilt. The small stems are quickly protected by the oaks defensive chemistry and do not seem to be attractive to visits by disease spreading sap beetles.

Some gardeners plant a bed of Asiatic jasmine around the offending tree because the groundcover and oak sucker leaves look alike. The jasmine hides the oak suckers.