Study: Ammonium sulfate fertilizer fights summer patch

A new study shows that ammonium sulfate fertilizer (21-0-0-24S) suppresses summer patch, a fungal disease attacking the roots of grasses, according to Dr. Joseph Heckman of Rutgers University.

Heckman said the intensity of this turf disease increases during hot, humid summers. Summer patch affects Kentucky bluegrass, annual bluegrass and fine fescues. Heckman has been working with Rutgers plant pathologists David Thompson and Bruce Clarke.

Tests in 1991 showed a 60-to 80-percent reduction in summer patch when ammonium sulfate was applied and a 55-to 45-percent reduction when sulfur-coated urea was applied compared to urea or nitrate.

Thompson said it is often hard to forecast if the weather will be conducive to summer patch. "It's often hard to foresee if the weather will be conducive to summer patch, problems, and fungicides must be applied as preventive treatments at high rates due to the soil-borne nature of the disease.

Another study, by Thompson, revealed that this fertilizer reduced soil pH more than urea. "Ammonium sulfate reduces soil pH almost immediately and that has been shown to suppress summer patch in our test on Kentucky bluegrass," Thompson said.

Neither calcium nitrate nor potassium nitrate offer the pH lowering effect found with ammonium sulfate, according to Thompson.

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