Clark Talks Turf

TIMELY TURF ADVICE

Is 2012 a Good Year for Nematodes?

Billy Crow, Ph.D., is an associate professor of landscape nematology at the University of Florida-Gainesville and conducts research on managing nematodes on golf courses, including evaluation of nematode control products. He can be reached at wtcr@ufl.edu.

Q What is the level of nematode activity so far this year in Florida?

So far the level of nematode activity is higher this year in Florida and in other coastal states due to the mild winter. Soil temperature didn't drop much and nematodes stayed active over the winter. As the bermudagrass started to grow this spring the nematodes were active and started to feed on the roots. Sting nematode is the most damaging species to turfgrass that we observe in our work in Florida.

We observe more nematode damage on ultradwarf bermudagrass cultivars than older cultivars such as Tifdwarf. The ultradwarfs naturally have less root mass than Tifdwarf to start with and are mowed lower than Tifdwarf, which results in fewer roots. So when nematodes start to attack roots, the ultradwarfs suffer more damage than the older bermudagrass greens cultivars.

Q Are you seeing more nematode activity across the country?

Unfortunately, yes. As ultradwarf bermudagrass greens are being planted in the transition zone the sting nematode is being spread to new locations where it doesn't occur naturally. Sting nematodes thrive in the sand root zone of a putting green, so once sting nematodes are carried along with the ultradwarf bermudagrass sprigs, it is only a matter of time until they start to damage the grass. I am also receiving reports of root knot nematode becoming more of a problem on ultradwarf greens in Florida and as far west as California.

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Q What cultural practices do you recommend to reduce nematode damage?

Raise the mowing height. This is especially helpful on greens. By increasing the mowing height, the bermudagrass will produce more roots and the turfgrass plants will be able to better withstand the nematode feeding. Alleviate as much stress on the turfgrass as possible. Stimulate microbial activity in the rootzone by using organic fertilizers or compost teas or applying microbes. Stimulating microbial activity overall will help suppress nematodes.

Please notice I said suppress nematodes. Stimulating microbial activity may help in some, but not all cases. The results are highly variable but it is worth a try to stimulate the soil microorganisms.

Q What chemical control options are available for nematodes?

For all chemical nematode control products check to make sure the product is labeled for use in your state and your specific location within that state. Each product has unique directions to use the product effectively. Make sure you read, understand and follow all the directions to achieve the maximum performance from the product.

Curfew (Dow AgroSciences), Nortica (Bayer Environmental Science), Avid (Syngenta) and Multiguard Protect (AgriGuard) are all labeled for use to control nematodes in certain locations and all have performed well. Application timing is critical to achieving effective control with these products.

There are several other nematicides for turf that are under development.

Q Is there anything else you would like to add?

Consistent, long-term nematode management must be based on a multiprong IPM approach that incorporates species and cultivar selection, sound cultural practices and the use of chemical controls. None of these prongs is a silver bullet by itself. All must be used as part of an IPM plan to successfully manage nematodes. We are currently developing comprehensive nematode managing programs and look forward to sharing those with the golf industry.

Clark Throssell, Ph.D., loves to talk turf. He can be reached at clarkthrossell@bresnan.net.