

Red Thread and Rust Control

Q: What is the best way to control red thread and rust mold? I'm seeing a lot of these diseases in lawns I service and want to know what to tell the homeowners.

A: *Our answer comes from Dr. Dave Shetlar, landscape entomologist at Ohio State University:*

Even though I'm an entomologist, this question is asked all the time and I'm very familiar with what our plant pathologists have said. For both the diseases that you mention - redthread and rust - most plant pathologists agree that these are associated with turf under stress, usually minimum fertilization and improper watering.

Rust is also becoming much more of a problem as many lawns are now mainly perennial ryegrass cultivars that are highly susceptible to rust. When these lawns were mainly Kentucky bluegrass, we had much less problem with rust throughout the cool-season turf areas.

For both diseases, most pathologists are recommending a minimum of three pounds of Nitrogen per year and more like four pounds N. During the heat of the summer, slow release is desired in order to keep the nutrients coming as the turf grows.

Irrigation timing is also extremely important. Many folks have been told to water at night to save water, but this can be a turf disease disaster if the watering is done in the evening or in the middle of the night. If night watering is demanded, it should be done within an hour or two of daybreak in order to get the turf dried off as soon as possible.

ON-LINE RESOURCES

You might put into your web browser (I use google.com) the key words "turf rust control" or "red thread control" and see the dozens of fact sheets that pop up!

If irrigation restrictions are not a factor, many suggest watering in mid-morning so that the turf dries in mid-day and stays dry. Light and frequent watering (i.e., daily) is also poor management in this case. Try to irrigate only once or twice a week and water deeply (until the top two to three inches of soil is moist).

If these diseases show up, some also recommend dropping the mowing height by a half inch - this is assuming that the homeowner is mowing at the recommended three inches. If the lawn is already being mowed at two inches or less, then a light fertilization (no more than one-half pound of N) and deep but infrequent watering is the best remedy.

There are fungicides registered for both diseases, but these generally are considered too costly for normal lawn maintenance - especially when adjustments to fertility, irrigation and mowing height practices often can solve the problem.