

CLASSIFIEDS

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Jrco

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Murphy's Law

Dr. James Murphy is an Associate Extension Specialist in Turfgrass Management for Rutgers, department of Plant science. Ask Dr. Murphy your questions: E-mail us at sfmanjchapter@netscape.net

Question:

Iron has been around for years in many forms. I see it in many standard fertilizer formulations and I have had it promoted to me by contractors, included with my weed control applications. All I know is that it is supposed to make the grass green. How does it work? Is there more than just aesthetic value to this product?

Answer:

There is some controversy regarding the use of iron in turf management when there are optimum conditions for iron availability in the soil. Some scientists contend that the dark colored spray used in many iron applications is reason for the immediate "dark" greening response often observed. The small dark spots that form on the leaf after the spray application give the darkening appearance. There is little research to support any benefits or iron application beyond aesthetics when iron supply is adequate in the soil.

Under conditions of deficiency, however, iron applications will certainly improve the color and health of turf because iron is necessary for chlorophyll formation (photosynthesis) in leaves and other plant processes. Iron deficiencies are most prevalent in high pH soils. Deficiencies of iron become more prevalent as the soil pH increases above 7 (neutral). Iron deficiencies may also be associated with high soil temperatures that cause a severe loss of roots or declining root viability. A limited root system can restrict the supply of any nutrient that must be taken-up from the soil.

Under these conditions, applications of iron would be very beneficial. In high pH soils, a chelated form of iron is necessary to avoid having the iron rapidly converted to an unavailable form. Acidifying materials could also be useful in improving iron availability. Foliar applications are often used to avoid the problem of iron becoming unavailable in the soil.

KILMER N. J. P&DC 11/02/01 17:46 MLB/ISS#2

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