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Summer Turf Kill

During the past few weeks, many turf areas have begun their annual "brown-out." Needless to say, non-irrigated areas are going out before those that are irrigated. One of the main reasons why this happens is that the growing point of the turf plant gets too hot. When the growing points get too hot, the life functions which occur in that area no longer take place, or take place at a much reduced rate.

There are two ways the plant has to keep its growing point cool. One way is by the movement of water through the plant and resulting loss of water vapor from the leaves. This will occur as long as there is a supply of moisture in the soil.

Because the growing point of the turf plant is near the surface of the soil, the leaves of the plant aid in keeping it cool. The insulating effect of the leaves is most important. As the leaf surface area is reduced, the growing point becomes more exposed to the sun's heat.

The height at which you set your mowers determines the leaf surface area of your turf plants. The lower you mow, the warmer the growing point will become. The warmer the growing point, the browner the grass will become.

A bluegrass turf cut at two inches look far different this time of year than one cut at less than one inch. I have talked to some turf managers that have been able to sneak up their height of cut. The resulting increase in leaf surface area has produced a better turf. I really believe these mowers should be set just as high as possible.

In order for bluegrass to stay in an optimum growing situation during the summer, besides nutrients it must have adequate moisture and cool temperatures at the growing points. Without either adequate moisture or cool temperatures, bluegrass will tend to brown-out in the summer.

A couple of weeks ago we experienced the loss of turf even though we had more than an adequate moisture supply. The temperatures of the growing points got too high and a lot of grass died. The grass cut the shortest suffered the most and, of course, some species such as **Poa annua** will not take much heat at all.

Another point to note—The higher the height of cut, the better the turf withstands damage from traffic.

Give serious thought to the height your mowers are set for and if at all possible keep it up.

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 Extension Turf Specialist
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