

GET THE JUMP ON SPRING DISEASES WITH AN EARLY TREATMENT REGIME

Your turf survived the ravages of winter due to successful transitional management. But, is it prepared to handle the onslaught of spring diseases, namely leaf spot, melting-out and dollar spot?

"Unless you get a jump on spring diseases with early fungicide treatments, you may play a losing game called 'catch-up' the rest of the year," warns Joseph Niedbalski, TUCO plant health specialist, product/field development.

Your turf may appear vibrant, healthy and green now, but it's condition during summer — a period of environmental stress, intense disease pressure and heavy play — is what counts.

Once diseases gain the upper hand, you're forced to spray more frequently in a desperate attempt to halt their unremitting spread. This 'catch-up' approach is costly, resulting in damaged turf, dissatisfied golfers and devastated superintendents.

One way to prevent disasters and minimize turf loss is to identify major disease problems now — before they occur. This approach allows you to implement a disease control program to effectively combat your specific problems.

"The key to controlling spring turf diseases is early fungicide treatments before diseases establish themselves," says Niedbalski. "Once established, diseases spread rapidly and are extremely difficult to control."

He recommends applying a turf fungicide such as Acti-dione RZ® or Acti-dione TGF® immediately after the first mowing. "Furthermore, early applications may serve to reduce the number of treatments required during summer."

An early spray program enables you to obtain the healthiest turf possible from Memorial Day through Labor Day when the bulk of golfers are on the course. "Strong, healthy turf is better able to resist disease epidemics than turf in a weakened condition," he states.

According to Niedbalski, a number of factors influence disease severity. "Some people assume a mild winter causes more disease activity in the spring. This isn't necessarily true," explains Niedbalski. "A mild winter may result in greater fungal inoculum density, however, disease severity depends on favorable environmental conditions. Temperature, humidity levels, amount of rainfall, course location and turfgrass species all affect disease activity."

Effective control of leaf spot (*Helminthosporium* species) demands an early treatment regime. Leaf spot overwinters in thatch and a large number of spores are produced during late fall, winter and spring months.

Spring rains splash these spores onto emerging leaf blades, causing lesions that are tan in the center and dark brown on the edge. As the disease progresses, the crown becomes infected and the plant may rot. If not treated, severe leaf spot infections, also known as melting-out, can wipe out large areas of turf. Conditions favoring the development of leaf spot include close cutting, excessive irrigation and a high level of nitrogen.

Regular, early applications of Acti-dione RZ which contains an antibiotic — Anti-dione — and PCNB, create a fungistat barrier which helps keep diseases, such as leaf spot, from spreading. "Regular applications should be made at 14- to 21-day intervals. Disease severity may dictate a shortened interval of 7 to 10 days for at least 2 to 3 applications."

Dollar spot, an early fall disease, is also a problem in the late spring. Warm days and cool nights provide an ideal setting for the development of dollar spot, as does a low nitrogen

level, dry soil and high humidity. Disease symptoms appear as light tan lesions with a reddish border on the leaf blade.

"To control dollar spot, apply Acti-dione TGF after first mowing in the spring," says Niedbalski. "After the first spray, follow a 7- to 10-day treatment schedule to mid-May for optimum control."

Disease-causing fungi are present year-round and are a constant threat to golf courses across the country. Many superintendents have discovered the most economical and effective approach to vigorous, healthy turf is a well-planned four-season disease management program.

By getting a jump on spring diseases with early fungicide applications, superintendents can maintain quality turf throughout peak play periods.

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Dr. David J. Wehner, Turfgrass Specialist at U. of I. discussing his program of research and trials at Urbana.



Dr. Hank Wilkenson, Plant Pathologist at U of I explaining his research program.



David Ward explaining his sand topdressing programs at Ravisloe C.C. and moderating the Sand Topdressing of Greens session.