

IMPACT ON THE BUSINESS

Treating dollar spot preventively saves in more ways than one

BY CINDY CODE

Dollar spot is one of the most recognized and ubiquitous diseases on golf courses, wreaking havoc on cool-season turf but less destructive to warm-season turf such as bermudagrass.

Its economic impact is hard to quantify, but it's considered enough of a threat that most superintendents work proactively to treat dollar spot rather than wait for the disease to make an appearance.

However, that wasn't always the case. In the past, if superintendents were surveyed with the question of when they first spray fungicides to manage dollar spot, many would answer after they first see it. Historically, this was true because there was no sure way of predicting it. Depending on the year, the first outbreaks of dollar spot might appear any time from June to early July, and were treated on an as-needed basis.

Now, superintendents work to treat their courses for dollar spot because they prefer not to see the familiar round, tan spots on their courses.

"Superintendents are spending more money on pesticides because they don't want to see insect or disease infestations," says Stan Zontek, Mid-Atlantic director for the USGA Green Section. "Many courses figure it's easier and cheaper to spend money upfront to prevent a problem than to fix it."

Treating diseases is becoming much more of a preventive than curative proposition because turf blemishes are unacceptable, Zontek says.

"It becomes a real problem if you get into treating a disease because if you have dollar spot on fairways and a golfer or a g.m. asks you, 'Why does that grass look the way it

does?' Some try to save money and wait until they see a problem and then try to react as quick as they can," he says. "A huge percent of cases that I see, people just don't want to see dead grass, particularly if it's preventable."

Consequently, superintendents decide to spend the money upfront. In many cases, it's the separation between the better clubs and average courses.

Contact and systemic fungicides are used to treat dollar spot. While systemics must enter a plant, go through a transformation and be metabolized by the plant to manage dollar spot, contacts act more as a topical skin cream but can easily wash off. As a result, many superintendents tank mix contact and systemic fungicides to create twice the chemical to cure the disease and prevent the next outbreak.

Most superintendents are sensitive to criticism. Each club has to make judgment decisions. Some choose to wait while others don't.

Dollar spot has become more prevalent during the past five to eight years, says Terry Bonar, CGCS, at Canterbury Golf Club in Beachwood, Ohio.

"I don't know if it's a different variety from years ago, but it's more of a problem today," he says. "Before, we could outgrow it by putting nitrogen down and growing the grass. Now when it affects the turf, it takes it down to the dirt. It's a disease to be reckoned with and very prevalent in this part of the country. It's a problem for every course."

Bonar preventively sprays light rates of fungicide every week – rather than every other week – to manage dollar spot. Daconil is his

primary contact fungicide of choice.

"Once you have dollar spot, you have to increase your fungicide rates to get rid of it," he says. "Certainly not the whole course, but you need to spray where it's infected. Once it appears, the next time disease pressure appears, dollar spot pops up. So, it's certainly easier to keep it out."

Bonar follows research conducted by The Ohio State University that shows treating dollar spot in the early

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spring knocks the inoculant down. For superintendents who only spray three times a season, Michigan State University recommends that spring is the most important application, he says.

Bonar generally applies a systemic fungicide (Bayleton) in early April and then turns to a weekly program beginning in May until the first or second week of September. By the end of the season, dollar spot isn't a problem. Bonar will spot spray in the fall, but it's not just for dollar spot; he's also treating snow mold.

Canterbury spends about \$35,000 a year treating turf diseases, which is comparable to other private clubs. Bonar says he's fortunate to have the resources to keep dollar spot at bay. He's been superintendent at Canterbury since 1984 and says dollar spot appears the worst on tee edges and fairways. GCI