

# Clark Talks Turf

■ TIMELY TURF ADVICE



## → Be Aware of Spring Diseases

REGULAR SCOUTING THIS SPRING CAN HELP YOU KEEP AN UPPER HAND ON SPRING DISEASES OF COOL-SEASON GRASSES.

BY CLARK THROSSELL, PH.D.

**F**ortunately, spring diseases are not a major problem on cool-season grasses in most years. However, they can be a nuisance, and in some cases can cause enough damage to compromise the playing surfaces and bring out the ire of golfers. As spring unfolds, scout regularly for *Microdochium* patch, yellow patch, take-all patch and leaf spots and melting out.

**Microdochium patch** or pink snow mold (*Microdochium nivale*) can be a problem whenever there is wet weather and air temperatures are in the range of 30 to 60 degrees F. Symptoms of *Microdochium* patch are roughly circular patches a few inches to a foot or more in diameter of damaged turf with a border that is often pink. *Microdochium* patch can occur without snow cover and last well into spring as long as cool, overcast and wet conditions are prevalent. Those superintendents who applied fungicides in late fall or early winter for preventive control of snow mold should be aware that the fungicide is probably no longer effective to control *Microdochium* patch that occurs this spring. The fungicide applied last fall has long since degraded. If *Microdochium* patch is present early in spring, consider a fungicide applica-

tion to priority areas of the golf course. Otherwise you might battle it until the weather warms up and dries out.

**Yellow patch** (*Rhizoctonia cerealis*) is seen in the spring when air temperatures are 50 to 65 degrees F and the soil is wet. It is more common during cloudy weather or under shade.

If *Microdochium* patch is present early in spring, consider a fungicide application to priority areas of the golf course. Otherwise you might battle it until the weather warms up and dries out.

Symptoms of yellow patch are rings or arcs that are usually 6 to 12 inches in diameter with a 1- to 2- inch outer margin that is yellow. The good news is that yellow patch only causes cosmetic damage and does not harm the turf. To control yellow patch, wait for air temperatures to reach 70 degrees F or more and the rings will fade away.

**Take-all patch** (*Gaeumannomyces graminis* var. *avenae*) infects the roots of creeping bentgrass that is less than 10 years old when soil temperatures are in the range of 50 to 65 degrees F, but symptoms are noticed later when air temperatures warm up and the soil dries out. Since take-all patch damages roots, symptoms are not noticed until the turf experiences warm to hot temperatures and dry conditions. Symptoms are sunken bronze patches a few inches to 2 feet or more in diameter.

**Leaf spots and melting out** (caused by numerous species of *Drechslera* and *Bipolaris*) are found under a wide range of temperatures depending on the specific fungal species present. They can last throughout the growing season. On a leaf blade, leaf spot appears as an oval lesion that is dark purple, brown, black or red in color depending on the fungal species present. From a distance, turf infected with leaf spot will have an off-color or perhaps yellowish appearance. Reducing hours of leaf wetness by watering in early morning or dragging to remove dew can reduce leaf spot damage. Avoiding more than 0.5 lbs. soluble nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. will also help minimize damage from leaf spot.

Regular scouting this spring can help you keep an upper hand on spring diseases of cool-season grasses. Once a disease has been identified you may decide to use cultural control practices, apply a fungicide or wait for the weather to change. All are appropriate strategies depending on your circumstances.

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