

## Is There A Normal Summer?

By **Bruce Schweiger**, Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab Manager, O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility

Summer in Wisconsin has no normal. Each year as we head for summer there is nothing we can count on as far as weather. We all wait for the “Dog Days of Summer” but what or shall I ask are the Dog Days of Summer? According to Weather.com:

*If you thought that was a term your grandma made up, you'll be surprised to learn the phrase dates back to ancient Rome. “Caniculares dies,” or days of the dogs, was what the Romans called the period from the first week of July to the second week of August.*

*Located in Canis Major is a star named Sirius, also called the “Dog Star.” With the exception of our sun, Sirius is the brightest star visible from Earth. The brilliant, blue-white star's name comes from the Greek word for “searing.”*

*Because Sirius is so bright, it was easy to track even for early astronomers. During April and early May, Sirius was visible in the southwest after sunset. But by the time mid-summer would come along, Sirius would rise and fall with the sun and get lost in the daytime light.*

*However, the ancients knew that the “Dog Star” was still there, up in the sky with the sun during the hottest time of the year. They reasoned that since Sirius was so bright and up there with the sun, it must be adding to the heat to produce the hottest time of the year.*

We know that the Sirius does not disappear and that it does not add any heat to the earth, but we dread these five weeks of summer.

The summer of 2014 these so call dog days of summer were maybe the most pleasant weather I can remember for that stretch of time. For those of you that made the track



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to the OJ Noer for Summer Field Days you know the day was perfect. So with such a great year how come we had so many disease issues?

From work that Dr. Koch has been doing this year on dollar spot modeling we saw three spikes in the dollar spot weather. Thanks to social media the days when I arrived at the Noer and walked out on the plots to find massive dollar spot I was assured that I was not alone. Of course I was excited to see how the various dollar spot fungicide trials looked. As I text and tweeted with many of you I realized I have been converted.

The Superintendents I was talking to were not as excited as I was. In my defense the data we were able to compile this summer is wonderful. According to Dr. Koch this might be one of the best data years in a very long time. Two years with Dr. Koch and as they say he has moved my cheese.

Receiving a sample into my lab is a bitter pill since it means that one of my fellow turfies is having a problem. My entire career has been trying to prevent turfgrass disease. Once the sample is logged in I then begin the procedures that Dr. Koch has taught me

and try to be as much assistance to the Turf Manager as possible. The paradox of this is that up until now turf disease has been the unwanted part of my career but now our research, fungicide trials and disease diagnostics lab are all driven by active disease. Oh how things have changed! This sum-


mer was dominated by three diseases, dollar spot (*Sclerotinia homoeocarpa*), Basal antracnose (*Colletotrichum graminicola*) and Necrotic Ring Spot (*Ophiosphaerella korrae*). It appears the cool wet spring and very mild summer provided a perfect environment for these diseases.

Aside from these issues the summer was fairly calm. I only saw three cases of pythium but the interesting find was the number of flying ant issues. See *Golf Course Maintenance*, May 2001, Dr. Chris Williamson, “Dollar Spot? Maybe not”.

During the summer more than a few superintendents either called me or sent in samples of dollar spot they could not control. They had thrown the kitchen sink at it and it was not getting better. A quick review, tells us that as these corn ants emerge they actually fight for territory and in that battle they release formic acid that causes the damage to the plant. There is not much we can do after the damage is done except wait for the plants to recover. This is a real brief description but I encourage you to read this article again. If you cannot find it just send me an e-mail and I can forward it to you (bschweiger@wisc.edu).

So even in an “easy” year we still can find turf issues. I guess that shows me how valuable the lab can be to everyone involved. As one contract member put it, “It is like and insurance policy, I never want to use it but am I glad it is there when I need it”.

Have a great fall and if possible get out and enjoy the fall weather because we are geared up for our Snow Mold trials and that means snow is just around the corner.

Remember January 6th is the WTA Winter Conference. More information will follow but I look forward to seeing many happy faces in-person and on the webinar. 



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