

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

By Roger Funk, Ph.D., Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio

Q: What causes the galls on the stems of oleander, and how can we control them? (Florida)

A: Both fungal and bacterial galls have been reported on oleander but, unfortunately, neither can be controlled with chemicals. Cut off and destroy the infected parts, and sterilize the pruners between each cut with alcohol or clorox.

Q: Stripe smut is the number one problem in our area. I would appreciate knowing the latest practices for controlling this disease on homeowner lawns. (Ohio)

A: Stripe smut disease called by *Ustilago striiformis* (West.) is the most common systemic disease of Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis* L.) in the United States and is considered to have no good control. The success or failure of a disease management program is dependent upon prompt diagnosis and the proper timing and application of fungicides as well as proper cultural practices.

The first symptoms are long, parallel, yellowish streaks on leaf blades which darken as the disease progresses. Blades finally rupture, exposing black, sooty spores after which the shredded blades turn straw-colored, shrivel and collapse.

The fungus reactivates in spring or fall resulting in gradual decline of turf. Intensive irrigation and fertilization can promote progressive decline by thinning the turf. There is some evidence that sodded lawns decline faster than seeded lawns. Diseased areas may be from an inch to more than a foot in diameter.

Some of the factors contributing to the progress of stripe smut are susceptible cultivars, heavy thatch, cool temperatures (50°-60°F.), intense irrigation, and heavy fertilization.

New growth can be infected by systemic spread of disease. Best control can be achieved by use of relatively resistant Kentucky bluegrass cultivars, moderate cultural practices and use of fungicides. Your local extension service should be able to help you select cultivars best suited to your area.

For established turf in home lawns, proper management practice should minimize the disease.

Do not overfertilize or irrigate turf heavily where the disease is present.

Systemic fungicides, such as benomyl (Tersan 1991) and the thiophanates (Clearly 3336, Fungo 50), applied once or twice in early spring and mid-to-late fall and heavily watered into the soil for maximum absorption by the roots, may prevent but will not eradicate the disease.

There is some evidence that the stripe smut pathogen (fungus) may develop resistance to systemic fungicides. Therefore, use a single application in the spring and fall if possible, but do not exceed two applications in either season. READ THE LABEL AND FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS.

Q: How effective are the fluid limestones that are being used by some lawn care companies? (Pennsylvania)

A: Fluid limestones contain limestone particles ground to a fineness of at least 200 mesh and clay to help keep the limestone in suspension.

The effectiveness of any limestone in neutralizing soil acidity is dependent upon its carbonate content and particulate size. Limestones coarser than 20 mesh are very slow to react and have limited value in turf management; limestones finer than 100 mesh react within several weeks after application.

Because of their fineness, fluid lime reacts very quickly. However, dry limestone of the same fineness will react at the same rate.

Fluid limestone has two advantages over the use of dry limestone: it can be spread more evenly and has no dust problem. The biggest disadvantage is the volume of material handled. Since a fluid limestone mix will contain about 50% limestone, it requires twice as much on a weight basis as an equivalent limestone applied dry.

Q: What do you think about the new plastic foam sheets to protect container stock during winter? (Ohio)

A: In 1979, Dr. Gouin, Professor of Horticulture at the University of Maryland, reported that conventional techniques of overwintering container-grown plants cost about four times more than protecting plants with polypropylene microfoam sheets. I suggest that you contact Dr. Gouin for the current status of his research.

Q: Can siduron be used to prevent crabgrass when seeding Kentucky 31 tall fescue? (Idaho)

A: According to a study conducted at the University of Nebraska, siduron can impair establishment of Kentucky 31 even when applied at the recommended rate. It is recommended that the Kentucky 31 seeding rate be increased by 10% and that the seed be applied as early as possible in the spring. The application rate of siduron should not exceed six pounds per acre.

Q: Could you tell me where I can buy a product called Deer Away? Will it protect young conifers? (Michigan)

A: If you contact the Weyerhaeuser Company which has been assigned the patent for Deer Away, I am sure they could provide the name of the nearest distributor. We have not tested Deer Away, but it is registered with the EPA as a deer repellent for conifers, seedlings, ornamental plantings and orchards.

Send your questions or comments to: Vegetation Management c/o WEEDS TREES & TURF, 757 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Leave at least two months for Roger Funk's response in this column.