

## Start the year in control

As April approaches, equipment should be in shape, clean-up and correction of winter damage complete, and preemergence weed control programs either in progress or ready to go. Furthermore, you are a step ahead of insects after dormant oil spraying and important trees and shrubs have been pruned and fertilized. You are ready for the busy season.

### Snow Mold Control

Northern landscape managers have been warned by turf pathologists that snow mold conditions are perfect. Snow has covered much of the North for more than three months after a cool, wet fall.

Bentgrasses and Kentucky bluegrasses are more susceptible to both gray and pink snow mold than red fescue.

Gray snow mold afflicts turfgrass under snow cover. It appears in the spring as circular gray to straw-colored spots, six to twelve inches in diameter. When the snow melts the damage is already done. To have any effect, fungicide applications must be made before snowfall for gray snow mold.

Pink snow mold can occur without snow cover, just as long as conditions are cool and wet. Symptoms are reddish patches from one to eight inches wide.

Michigan State University Pathologist Dr. Joe Vargas warns that snow mold damage may seem small, but year after year it takes a cumulative toll and helps *Poa annua* encroach on bentgrass. "All you can do in the spring is try to warm up and dry out the soil surface and give the turf a shot of nitrogen to help it recover," says Vargas.

A preventative program of fungicide applications should be seriously considered for this fall if you had a problem this winter. There is growing evidence that spring diseases contribute to the severity of summer turf diseases. Also, research at Iowa State University has shown considerable leaf spot activity in the fall. Iowa State Pathologist Clinton Hodges recommends extending disease control programs into the winter.

Finally, there are indications fungicide rates can be lowered after the first few years of application with the same degree of control.

### Turf Fertilization

Cool-season turfgrass plants shift their biological emphasis from root growth and food storage to foliage growth in the spring. Carbohydrates stored in the roots during winter are utilized in the spring to produce foliage. In the spring, turf is also recovering from damage inflicted over the winter.

Warm-season turfgrasses concentrate on root growth during late spring and summer months. They must go through the fall, winter dormancy, and

spring transition before they resupply the carbohydrates in their roots. Texas A&M Agronomist Dr. James Beard has shown dieback of the roots of warm-season grasses following spring green up. By spring, warm-season turf is out of gas.

Nitrogen is definitely a necessity for turf health in the spring. However, some agronomists warn turf managers not to overdo nitrogen applications in the spring since excessive stimulation of foliage growth may deplete carbohydrate reserves and reduce the plant's ability to recovery from spring and summer stresses.

If you use quick-release fertilizers, apply the recommended amount of nitrogen in four parts throughout the year rather than dumping the entire amount onto the turf in the early spring. Slow-release nitrogen sources help prevent overly-lush turf since they release the nitrogen slowly over a two- to four-month period.

More turf managers are applying fertilizer in late fall to assist cool-season grasses as they store carbohydrates, and in the late spring and summer to help warm-season grasses do the same.

### Plan Annual Displays

A complete landscape includes annual flowers. The impact of flowers goes a long way to indicate professionalism in landscaping. Commercial landscapes without annual and/or perennial flowers are incomplete.

The primary advantage of planning now for annual displays is you can contract with a local greenhouse and save a significant amount of money and get the types of plants you need. Waiting until the plants show up at local garden centers forces you to pay the going price and take what they have.

If flower beds are part of your current landscape, then now is the time to fine-tune the display to improved varieties or ones needing less maintenance. See the article by Ann Reilly in this issue for types of annuals and their proper location and use.

### Weed Control

Keep in mind a second application of preemergence turf herbicide may be necessary. Postemergence turf herbicides should be selected and ordered.

Weed control in plant beds should start soon with heavy dependence on preemergence herbicides such as Ronstar, Devrinol, and Treflan. These save hours of hand labor later in the year.

Plant beds with serious weed problems last year should be fumigated with either Dowfume or Vapam. Be sure to protect or remove desirable plants. Moving plants now is easier than later as far as recovery.

