PROBLEM SOLVERS

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Chinch bug alternative

Problem: *This year we had serious problems with chinch bugs. We have used diazinon in the past as well as this year and had variable results. Are there any better products on the market which we can use next year? I would appreciate your comments in this regard. (Pennsylvania)*

Solution: I agree with your observations and experience. I have also seen chinch bug problems in many lawns this summer. By the visual symptoms, the problem can be misdiagnosed as disease or drought.

However, upon closer examination of the affected areas, particularly the thatch, a large number of chinch bug nymphs as well as adults may be found. Reports indicate that these destructive, sucking insects can build up in numbers very quickly because of their potential to lay 312-766 eggs per female. Both nymph and adults feed on turfgrass and are highly mobile; therefore, they can relocate readily.

For successful management of chinch bug problems, it is important to correctly identify the problem first, and then apply recommended insecticides when the pests are active. In your area chinch bugs usually have two generations.

The first generation of chinch bug matures in mid-summer and produces a second generation that continues to feed and develop until the weather gets colder. The variable results you have experienced with diazinon treatments may be related to improper timing and/or the product performance itself.

Reports from Penn State University indicate that diazinon - AG500 gave 75.5 percent control, while Dursban provided 93.7 percent control. Therefore, I would suggest you consider trying Dursban.

Aeration will help

Problem: *We are dealing with a number of landscape plants which are subjected to heavy traffic and compaction over the root area in several properties. Soil types around the trees could all be classified as clay-loam. These soils tended to be compaction prone and heavy in texture. Fertilizing or irrigating these plants presents a serious problem. Surface runoff of water and fertilizer which is difficult to soil inject are among our major concerns. Any suggestions to dealing with the problem is appreciated. (New York)*

Solution: Correction of soil compaction presents a major problem where heavy traffic is unavoidable. Whenever possible the compacted surface area within the drip-line of trees should be aerated by removing soil cores to improve air, water and nutrient movement. If desired, these areas can then be topdressed with coarse sand. Reports from Massachusetts indicate that, when dealing with compacted soils, the use of wetting agents such as Aqua-Gro at 1 oz. per 3 gallons (Aquatrols Corporation of America) can reduce surface runoff problems.

Creeping bent the culprit

Problem: *Creeping bentgrass presents a serious problem in many Kentucky bluegrass lawns. Would you please suggest some guidelines to follow in dealing with this problem. (Ontario, Canada)*

Solution: Kentucky bluegrass lawns are susceptible to contamination from creeping bentgrass, which spreads by stolons and produces roots at the nodes.

It starts as a small patch and begins to establish in lawns which were usually cut very short and received good irrigation. Once a Kentucky bluegrass lawn has become contaminated, it is very difficult to eradicate it completely.

Any lawn maintenance program which would inhibit bentgrass and favors other desireable grass is suggested for its control. The most important factor is controlling the amount of water applied. Heavy or frequent watering practices favors seed germination and seedling establishment.

Even under low mowing and heavy watering practices, bentgrass plants produce more surface rooting than bluegrass. By withholding water until the deep-rooted Kentucky bluegrass plants show drought symptoms, the more shallow-rooted bentgrass will be stressed. This stress inhibits bentgrass. The bentgrass will turn brown and will allow bluegrass plants to dominate. Another factor to consider is the removal of clippings. Broken stem pieces should be removed during mowing because, if the conditions are favorable, they can establish in new areas. Vertical mowing to break the stolons and removing them also is beneficial in managing the problem. Vertical mowing may be done at any time during the months of May, early June, September and October, but should not be done during July and August because of high temperatures. After vertical mowing, the area can be seeded with desirable grass seed. There is no product on the market which would selectively remove bentgrass from a Kentucky bluegrass lawn. Some reduction of bentgrass can be obtained by the application of Killex (Trimec) or 2,4-D herbicides applied two to three times during the growing season.

Remember that whenever these herbicides are used in lawns, there is a possibility of some adverse effects on desirable grass roots. Therefore, multiple applications should be done with this reservation.

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Questions should be mailed to Problem Solver, Weeds Trees & Turf, 7500 Old Oak Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44130. Please allow 2-3 months for an answer to appear in the magazine.