

Cool-season turf managers: watch for fairy ring, rust

If droughts return, the North could see a recurrence of the near-invulnerable fairy ring rust and two rarely-seen blights.

by Peter Landschoot, Ph.D.,
Penn State University

■ During periods of unseasonably warm temperatures and drought, diseases such as fairy ring and rust become major headaches.

Fairy ring is caused by one of about 60 different soil-inhabiting fungi, the most common being *Marasmius oreades*. Fairy ring symptoms usually appear as rings or arcs of dark-green, fast-growing grass, sometimes accompanied by mushrooms.

Fairy ring can be a severe disease problem under drought conditions. Below the dark-green rings are massive amounts of fungal mycelium that can repel water. If this occurs when soil water is depleted, the result is desiccation of the turf. The hydrophobic effect can be a serious problem if fairy ring is extensive and irrigation water is not available.

Additionally, *M. oreades* can produce a toxin called hydrogen cyanide that damages turfgrasses.

In most cases, a light application of nitrogen fertilizer or iron will "mask" the dark green color associated with fairy ring.

However, there is no fool-proof means

of controlling the fungus that causes the rings to occur. Fungicides are rarely effective in controlling the disease in the field. The problem with obtaining effective control in the field centers on getting enough of the fungicide to contact the large amount of mycelium that permeates the soil. Also, it is difficult to wet the soil with drenches of fungicides because of the hydrophobic condition caused by the fungus.

At present, suppression of the hydrophobic effects of fairy ring is best



Anthracnose basal stem and crown rot infests a *Poa annua* putting green.

obtained by persistent irrigation and application of wetting agents.

Manipulation of cultural practices is the best option for managing this disease.

Rust diseases—Rust can be troublesome during drought, or when the turf is not well-fertilized. Although rusts don't kill the plants they attack, they can weaken them.

Rusts are caused by fungi in the genus *Puccinia*, and usually occur in late summer in the northern states. They are most

common on ryegrasses and bluegrasses, but can attack nearly all turfgrass species. Rust diseases rarely warrant fungicide applications. The best approach to managing rust diseases:

- supply the plant with nitrogen fertilizer; and
- irrigate.

Fortunately, in most years, rusts occur at a time that coincides with late summer fertilizer applications and frequent rainfall.

Weather conditions in 1991 also gave rise to diseases that, until recently, were considered rare.

Other diseases—Two especially troublesome diseases on golf courses were: (1) anthracnose basal stem and crown rot, and (2) foliar blight of perennial ryegrass (caused by *Pyricularia grisea*).

Anthracnose blight is a serious problem on golf course fairways in the midwestern and northeastern U.S.

Another less common form of anthracnose occurs on the crowns and stem bases of annual bluegrass and bentgrass, and is referred to as anthracnose basal stem and

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Rust disease as it appears on Kentucky bluegrass.

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crown rot, (ABSCR) to distinguish it from the foliar blight.

Over the past 10 years, this disease has occurred more frequently on putting greens in several northeastern states. Symptoms of ABSCR on close-cut turf appear as yellow or orange-colored irregular patterns.

Poa annua is more frequently affected than bentgrasses:

1. Individual grass tillers turn yellow or orange at the leaf tips.

2. The entire leaf blade and sheath turn yellow and eventually a tan color.

3. The most distinct symptom of this disease is the black, rotted appearance of the crowns and stem bases.

4. The entire shoot can easily be removed from the plant crown.

5. Tiny, pincushion-like structures called acervuli may sometimes be observed on the stems and sheaths with a hand lens.

In Pennsylvania, we have observed the disease in early spring, mid-summer and late fall. In nearly every instance, the soils have been wet or saturated. The disease also appears to be more severe on compacted soils and under low mowing heights. Cultural practices such as aeration, light, frequent applications of nitro-

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gen fertilizers and high mowing heights may reduce some disease damage.

Some golf course managers report acceptable control when systemic fungicides are applied on a preventative schedule. The challenge in designing a preventive fungicide program for this disease lies in determining when it will occur.

Pyricularia blight—Last September, from New Jersey to Kentucky, many ryegrass fairways turned yellow and thin. At overseeded golf courses it was found that many of the new seedlings succumbed to rapid blighting and death. Weather conditions in many of these locations were very hot and humid over a period of several days. (It is important to realize that widespread problems such as this may be varied in cause and each situation must be considered on a case by case basis before making general conclusions.)

Pyricularia grisea was the primary culprit. This fungus is not well known above the transition zone, but is the cause of gray leaf spot on St. Augustinegrass and annual ryegrass in southern states.

On mature perennial ryegrass infected with *P. grisea*, early symptoms included:

● small, brown lesions or spots with dark brown borders;

● a zone of chlorotic tissue developed around the spots, eventually enveloping the entire leaf; and/or

● leaves often became tan in color and appeared shriveled.

In most cases, the crowns were not damaged and new leaf material was produced soon after cooler temperatures returned. Infected seedling plants appeared water-soaked and blue-gray in color. Many affected seedling plants collapsed within four or five days after symptoms first appeared.

It is unknown if resident populations of *P. grisea* were responsible for the occurrence of *Pyricularia* blight in southeastern Pennsylvania or if spores were carried from the South by a tropical storm that passed near this area immediately prior to disease outbreak. Plant pathologists will be monitoring this disease in the future to determine if this may be a disease we will have to contend with on a regular basis in the future.

—Dr. Landschoot is associate professor of turfgrass pathology at Penn State Univ.

New diseases greet turfgrass managers in warm-season areas

Two new diseases have been detected in certain southern turf areas, attacking St. Augustinegrass and bermuda.

by Monica L. Elliott, Ph.D.,
University of Florida

■ *Gaeumannomyces*-like fungi are ever-present. They cause root rot diseases on both cool- and warm-season turfgrasses throughout the world. Common diseases on cool-season turf include summer patch and necrotic ring spot on bluegrass species and take-all patch on bentgrass.

Until recently, spring dead spot was the only disease on warm-season turf caused

by *Gaeumannomyces*-like fungi. This disease occurs on bermudagrass in locations where the bermudagrass becomes dormant due to cold temperatures. It is known to be caused by three different fungi in the US:

● *Gaeumannomyces graminis* var. *graminis* (*G.g. graminis*);

● *Leptosphaeria korrae* and

● *Ophiospherella herpotricha*.

Exactly which pathogen is causing the
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Take-all patch of St. Augustinegrass: yellow, thinning turf in irregular patches.

Diagnostic Features of Prevalent Cool-Season Turfgrass Diseases

Disease	Causal agent(s)	Symptoms/signs	Susceptible grasses
Brown patch	<i>Rhizoctonia solani</i>	Large, circular brown patches or thinning of turf. On low-cut turf, patches often surrounded by dark rings. White, cottony mycelium may be present on high-cut turf in early morning.	Bentgrasses, ryegrass, tall fescue.
Dollar spot	<i>Lanzia spp.</i>	Small, bleached patches of dead grass appear in turf. Lesions on leaves are white, often with brown borders. White, cottony mycelium may be present on dew-covered turf in early morning.	All cool-season turfgrasses.
Leaf spot/melting out	<i>Drechslera</i> and <i>Bipolaris spp.</i>	Small tan lesions with purple or brown borders on leaf blades. In severe cases, the crowns are rotted and the turf may be significantly thinned.	Primarily Kentucky bluegrass. Other cool-season grasses may be affected.
Necrotic ring spot	<i>Leptosphaeria korrae</i>	Large ring-shaped patches, usually creating depressions in turf. Roots and crowns show brown or black rot.	Primarily Kentucky bluegrass. In some cases, fine fescues and annual bluegrass.
Pythium blight	<i>Pythium aphanidermatum</i> and other <i>Pythium spp.</i>	Irregular patches of blighted turf. White, dense, cottony mycelium growing in turf in morning.	Perennial ryegrass, bentgrasses, tall fescue.
Red thread/pink patch	<i>Laetisaria fuciformis/</i> <i>Limonomyces roseipellis</i>	Small red to pink patches of blighted turf. Long slender threads of red mycelium (red thread), or fluffy, pink mycelium (pink patch) growing out of foliage.	Fine fescues, perennial ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrass.
Summer patch	<i>Magnaporthe poae</i>	Large yellow or tan ring-shaped patches. A root crown rot is usually apparent.	Bluegrass and fine fescues.

Control Strategies for Prevalent Cool-Season Turfgrass Diseases

Disease	Cultural control	Chemical control	Resistant species/varieties
Brown patch	Avoid excess N in summer, increase air circulation, avoid excess watering, improve drainage.	anilazine; benomyl; chlorothalonil; iprodione; mancozeb; maneb thiophanates; thiram; vinclozolin	Kentucky bluegrasses are less-susceptible to brown patch than other cool-season turfgrasses.
Dollar spot	Avoid N deficiency, maintain good soil moisture, remove guttation and dew from leaf surfaces, avoid night watering.	anilazine; benomyl*; chlorothalonil; fenarimol; iprodione; mancozeb; propiconazole; thiophanates; thiram; vinclozolin	Resistant Kentucky bluegrass varieties include Adelphi, America Aspen, Challenger, Eclipse, Escort, Nassau, Somerset, Wabash**
Leaf spot melting out	Avoid excess N applications in early spring; mow 2" high; avoid light, frequent irrigation. Do not use benomyl, thiophanates or triadimefon to control.	anilazine; chlorothalonil; iprodione; maneb; mancozeb; vinclozolin	Resistant Kentucky bluegrasses include: Adelphi; Bristol; Destiny; Eclipse, Enmundi; Glade; Ikone; Liberty; Majestic; Mona; P-104; Rugby and Somerset.
Necrotic ring spot	Manage turf for maximum root growth; irrigate to maintain good soil moisture; maintain mowing height at 2" or above.	benomyl; fenarimol; propiconazole,	Perennial ryegrasses resistant.
Pythium blight	Improve drainage, increase air circulation, avoid excess N, reduce irrigation.	chloroneb; etridiazole; metalaxyl*; Fosetyl-AI; propamocarb	Kentucky bluegrass is less likely to be damaged by Pythium blight than other turf.
Red thread/pink patch	Maintain adequate fertility of turf (especially N).	alilazine, benomyl***, chlorothalonil, iprodione, propiconazole,	Resistant perennial ryegrasses include: Allaire, Commander, Delray; Manhattan II; Palmer; Pennant; Prelude; Regal; Regency; SR 4000; SR-4100; and Yorktown.
Summer patch	Avoid low mowing heights, reduce compaction, avoid overwatering in summer; improve drainage.	benomyl; fenarimol; propiconazole; thiophanates; triadimefon	Resistant Kentucky bluegrasses include Adelphi; Enmundi; Syd-sport and Touchdown.

* Resistance has been recorded.

** Based on National Turfgrass Evaluation Program and Penn State data. No endorsement of cultivars is intended for those mentioned, nor is criticism meant for cultivars not mentioned.

*** Controls red thread and not pink patch.

Source: Dr. Landschoot