

PLANT DIAGNOSIS

by JERRY ROCHE /
Editor-in-Chief

It's August, the lawn is brown in unusual, irregular patches. Your client is howling with disapproval because he's paying you good money to keep it green.

So what's the problem, Ace? Has the customer failed to turn on the sprinkler system, or has irrigation missed a spot or two? Is it one of those funky diseases you're always reading about—brown patch or maybe leaf spot? Or have the insects taken control of the lawn?

You don't have a lot of time; if the problem isn't resolved soon, you stand to lose another customer.

Worse yet, if you're a golf course superintendent, your most influential members are howling. You begin to perspire, and it's not from the 90-degree temperatures, either.

"Diagnosing plant problems is difficult and requires discipline and diverse knowledge," says Jim Chatfield of the Ohio State University Cooperative Extension Service. "Yet everyone wants an instant and simple answer, not to mention an inexpensive and certain solution.

"The best diagnosticians, the best horticulturists, learn every time they go onto a landscape. Diagnosis is both an art and a science. There are occasional 'gimmes,' but more often than not, your diagnosis will not be proven or certain."

So you get down on your hands and knees with your



Can you diagnose this problem?

trusty hand lens, looking for telltale signs. You grab your handy Swiss Army knife and cut out a small plug. Aha! Too much thatch, you think, which is having a detrimental effect on water availability to the

plant. We must aerate and adjust the irrigation schedule, you reason.

A week later, the grass is still brown, and if you were perspiring before, you're really sweating now.

How many times has this happened in your career? Don't feel lonely; it happens to every turf manager on a pretty regular basis. Even though your success depends on knowing what the problems are, you've doubtless mis-diagnosed problems before.

Write us, using the form below, to relay your experiences to 52,000 other turf managers—so they won't make the same mistake. Tell us what you thought the problem was, what it really was, how you found out and what you did about it. If we publish your observations and hints, we'll mail you a free LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT painter's cap. □

Your turn

Every other month, we report what readers think about current topics. Tell us how you correctly **DIAGNOSED** a tough agronomic problem. Tear out or photocopy this page, and fax or mail your response to: Talk Back, Landscape Management, 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44130 • Fax: 216/891-2675 • E-mail: 75553.502@compuserve.com

What plant malady have you had the hardest time diagnosing? Why?

COMMENTS _____

How did you finally correctly diagnose the problem?

COMMENTS _____

Name _____

Company/Organization _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____