

## The poop on bird waste

*Our tree climbing crews are concerned about catching disease germs from bird droppings on trees. Is this possible? If so, what can we do to prevent it?*

—INDIANA

A National Wildlife Health Center representative indicated that if bird droppings contain this "disease agent," it is possible for humans to be infected. However, if climbers protect themselves with proper safety clothing, gloves, goggles, hard hat, boots, and practice proper hygiene, this will help minimize exposure and in turn reduce their chance of being infected with a disease. In addition, cleaning boots and soiled tools in a mixture of two full caps of bleach in one gallon of warm water will help disinfect contaminated items.

A specific disease has been identified as a potential health problem when large numbers of birds roost during the night and large amounts of their droppings are in one area. A soil fungus called *Histoplasma capsulatum* can grow in bird droppings and cause Histoplasmosis in humans.

The fungus spores are usually inhaled, and produce a lung infection which is often mild and often goes unnoticed. A few severe cases result in fever, coughing, sweating and loss of weight. The potential for this disease is increased if the contaminated area is in an enclosed space. To help minimize the exposure, workers should wear

face masks to protect themselves from inhaling the fungal spores.

Reports indicate that most people who are exposed to this fungus develop an immunity without suffering any symptoms.

## Flooded fairways: help!

*We sprigged a golf course fairway with Bermudagrass during the summer of 1996. The heavy rains of early March have left the area under water for about a week. What kind of recovery should we expect from the Bermudagrass?*

—KENTUCKY

Do the following as soon as possible:

- 1) Remove debris or silt.
- 2) Remove, core or slice the thin crust of deposit.
- 3) Have the soil tested for pH, soluble salts and nutrient levels. Provide corrective treatments as needed.
- 4) If there are thin areas or no sign of Bermudagrass recovery, resprig as needed.
- 5) Since the turf was under water for an extended period, provide good cultural practices to help improve the plant health.

The lack of aeration and subsequent suffocation of living tissues is the major problem. Often, turfgrass under lowlands may encounter flooding from time to time and perhaps adapt to it. The problem usually comes from the length of time water is submerging or drowning the plant. Other factors which influence flooding injury

are: 1) turfgrass species; 2) depth of submergence; 3) physiological condition of the plant tissue; 4) temperature; and 5) light intensity. Another problem is the silt, sand and debris deposit on turf during a flood. Receding water may wash away the surface soil, exposing the root system. The chances of insect and diseases such as Pythium root rot may increase.

Soil deposits, salt and debris may be more of a problem in slow moving water. This debris, if found, should be removed immediately. Deposits of two inches or more should be removed or incorporated into the soil by vertical mowing such as dethatching or plowing. This is important to save the buried turf from dying. If the silt deposit is less than one inch, it may not cause permanent damage. Even in this case it is a good idea to remove as much as you can by gently washing the turf, or by vertical mowing or slicing to break the crust and allow air exchange and light penetration. Consider using a slicer seeder, dethatcher or aerifier to break the crust of silt or salt.

In addition to water-logging, submerged turf may show yellowing because of nitrogen deficiency or accumulation of some toxic bioproduct, etc. Flooding may also affect soil pH. It may increase the pH of acidic soil and decrease the pH of alkaline soil. **LM**



**BALAKRISHNA RAO**  
 Manager of Research and  
 Technical Development  
 for the Davey Tree Co.  
 Kent, Ohio

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"Ask the Expert"  
 Landscape Management  
 7500 Old Oak Blvd.  
 Cleveland, OH 44130

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