

Friday's Feature

By

Theresa Friday

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Be on the lookout for lawn problems during a wet summer

Midsummer is the most active growth period for our warm season lawns. Unfortunately, it is also the most active period for insects and some diseases, particularly if it has been a wet summer.

Wet summers usually mean more lawn caterpillars. Whenever small brown moths fly up as you mow, caterpillars are not far behind. The moths are there laying eggs and the caterpillars show up two to three weeks later.

Young caterpillars chew notches along the edge of the leaves. This creates a ragged appearance that may be hard to notice at first. Mature caterpillars eat a lot before they pupate and consume patches of turfgrass down to the crown. Because the turf looks scalped so quickly, people think that the damage occurs "overnight." Several caterpillar species can be turfgrass pests, including the tropical sod webworm, the fall armyworm, and the striped grass looper.



For more information on lawn caterpillars and your control options, visit the University of Florida "Lawn Caterpillars" online publication at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN608> or call your local Extension Agent.

Another insect to be on the lookout for is the chinch bug. St. Augustinegrass lawns are particularly susceptible to chinch bug injury now. The adults of this insect are only about 1/5 of an inch long. They are black with what appears to be a white "X" across their backs where their wings fold over. The immature nymphs may be pink to brown with a single white line across their backs.

To find these tiny insects you will need to part the turf canopy to the soil surface along a line where there is a change from damaged yellowing turf to healthy green turf. They move rather quickly, so keep an alert eye for their scurrying back into the turf.

These insects are somewhat unique in that they prefer hot sunny areas of the lawn over shade so their injury

symptoms generally appear in the open front lawn area first.

Control options can be found online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH036>, the University of Florida “Southern Chinch Bug Management on St. Augustinegrass” publication.

In addition to insects, diseases are also more common during summers.

Gray leaf spot of St. Augustinegrass can cause severe thinning of home lawns during the heat of summer. This disease is more common during extended periods of hot, humid weather. Infected turf will have irregular gray, dirty-yellow or ash-colored spots with brown, purple, or water-soaked borders on leaf blades. The disease is usually noticed first in shaded areas that remain damp longer. Under heavy disease development, the grass may have a burned or scorched appearance resulting in death or severe spotting of the leaf blades. Fungus spores are carried to sites of new infection by the wind, splashed rain, irrigation water, and mowers. Seldom will this disease kill an entire lawn, but can thin it severely enough to be unsightly and encourage weed infestations.



Controlling summer diseases is best accomplished by keeping the turf as healthy as possible by reducing stress conditions. Avoid excessive nitrogen fertilization. Water only when needed and early enough in the day so foliage will not remain wet overnight. Mow regularly at proper height with a sharp mower blade only when the turf is dry. Be prepared to apply fungicides according to label recommendations if climatic conditions favor disease proliferation.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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