When it’s hot and humid outside, afternoon rains can be a pleasant relief to the heat. Unfortunately, regular afternoon showers can also trigger a couple of diseases that affect St. Augustinegrass lawns.

Gray leaf spot is most often observed in the summer during prolonged periods of rainfall. Excessive, quick-release nitrogen fertilizer, compacted soil and use of the weed killer atrazine can increase the susceptibility of your lawn to this disease.

The most characteristic symptom is a very distinguishable leaf spot on the grass blade. Individual lesions start off as tiny brown spots, smaller than a pinhead. As these circular spots become larger, they elongate and become oblong. The spots will be brown to grayish in color. Spots will eventually unite to turn entire blades yellow and then brown. Heavily infested blades wither and cause the lawn to thin and generally look unhealthy.

Be sure to mow regularly at the proper height with a sharp blade and only when the turf is dry. If the ends of the grass blades are ripped or shredded due to a dull blade, the fungus has a much easier time invading the grass blade and producing symptoms.

For management and control options, view the online UF/IFAS publication at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PP126 or contact your local Extension Office.

The second disease frequently seen during the summer is commonly called “take all root rot.”

The first symptoms of this fungal disease usually appear in the summer as a yellowing of grass blades. At first glance, these symptoms could be mistaken as chinch bug damage, nutrient deficiencies or stress from waterlogged soils.

The initial symptoms appear on the roots, but you’re unlikely to notice them. If the turf is not being correctly watered, fertilized, or mowed, symptoms will begin to show above-ground as irregular yellow or light-green patches.
As time passes, the grass begins to thin out resulting in irregular patches a few feet in diameter that may eventually consume the entire lawn. When attacked, the St. Augustine grass may die entirely leaving bare ground or, there may be a patchwork of dead, declining and healthy turf. In many cases, the worst damage may occur in sunny locations.

Identifying grass with take all root rot is easier than controlling it. Ordinarily, if you try to pull a St. Augustine runner (stolon) up from the soil it hangs on tightly. In fact, the runner will usually break before much is pulled loose. If take all root rot has set in, the runners can easily be lifted from the soil. There are also small, blackened areas on the runners that pathologists call "lesions". These are readily seen with the naked eye.

Plant pathologists tell us that this is a stress related disease. Things like excessive rainfall, applying more nitrogen than necessary, low pH, improper mowing height, etc. may stress the grass leading to disease development. Therefore, following good management practices can help alleviate the danger of contracting take all root rot. Fungicides are available but their effectiveness is limited.

For more information on this problem, view the online UF/IFAS publication at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH079](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH079) or contact your local Extension Office.