

Ask The Plant Groom(tm) by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom(tm)

QA1095

I would appreciate your help on this one. I noticed some 'dead' spots in my St. Augustine over the past 6 weeks. Its not everywhere, just occurs in spots that have had the most water. The grass isn't totally dead, it's about half mixed with healthy blades and yellowish, thin blades. The spots do occur in circular patterns. Over the 1/3 acre yard, there are about 8 distinct areas. The largest in about 6 ft in diameter, one about 4 ft, one 3 ft, and the other five less than 2 ft. People have told me this is probably grubs. I put down a grub product about 3-4 wks ago along with winterizer. The winterizer has definitely promoted growth everywhere but the spots. The spots haven't gotten larger but the good grass isn't growing as well as the non spot areas. When you inspect the areas, the ground seems especially saturated and the root structure seems to be more fragile. Also, I don't have moles.

My thoughts are that it is some type of insect, but I don't know if it is grubs. If you think it is grubs, then how often do you think I should treat the entire lawn this winter and with what product. I'm concerned that I have mismanaged my first lawn because of the hot summers. We built our house last year and laid down 25 pallets of St. Augustine in July 2005. Until the last month, the grass has relied almost entirely on sprinklers, every other day. I kept the grass quite high this summer (4 inches) because I thought this would keep more moisture from the sprinklers shaded on the soil and reduce the evaporation. But now I think that I did not mow my yard regular enough and that the extra length of blades has stressed the grass. Bottom line, I don't want to lose my yard and could use your advice on treatment strategies this winter to get the yard off to a good start next spring.

Thank you - J. H.

Do not be concerned about grubs in your lawn or other insect pests. Your problem is/was most likely environmental. Our "hot" summer, relatively new lawn and over watering can cause problems as you have indicated.

Do not apply any insect or disease controls this time of year to your lawn. And, only use when needed.

To grow a healthy lawn; nutrients need to be available in the soil, adequate moisture available in the root zone and frequent mowing should occur. The best way to determine soil nutrients availability for grass, roses ,shrubs, vegetables or any other plants is to have it professionally analyzed in a lab. This may be accomplished by contacting any county office of Texas Cooperative Extension a member agency of the Texas A & M University System. We native Texans typically call these offices ... "the County Agent's office". And, they are.

Each of these offices across all (254) Texas counties can supply soil sample containers and instruction sheets. They can also be mailed if you will send your request and include a stamped self addressed envelope. If you wish, my office will mail you a kit too. Send a long self addressed envelope with two 1st class stamps on it to Soil Test Kit, 10056 Marsh Lane, Suite B-101, Dallas, TX 75229. As soon as we receive your stamped self addressed envelope with the required postage we will send you the requested kit the next business day.

Note: The same containers and instruction sheets are utilized state wide. This offer is good to anyone that contacts us.

After receiving the soil test results and recommendations ... follow them.

Lawns should only be irrigated when moisture is needed in the root zone. Never water on some pre-set schedule. Only apply water as and when needed. Most lawns in Texas will do well with 1 ½" of irrigation/rain per week. It is much better for grass roots to water less often but do irrigate deeply and throughly when needed. Plants need to grow healthy roots to grow healthy tops. Another way of state this

is; healthy plants can not be grown without healthy roots. Keeping soil 'wet' is a sure route to unhealthy roots.

Frequent mowing is the single most important physical activity we can do to help insure a thick lawn. Mow often enough to remove no more than 1/3 of the grass blade's height each time mowing is done. Always make sure the mower blade(s) is/are sharp. We want to cut the blades and not rip them off by a fast spinning piece of steel.

If your soil becomes dry through the winter do apply water as needed to prevent total dryness in the root zone and the grass' roots alive. Mow winter weeds as needed if you wish. There is no requirement to do anything with winter lawn weeds.

During Feb. 2007 apply a weed preventer of your choice according to label directions if you wish to help to prevent spring/summer weeds. Some lawn weed seeds may begin germinating in March. To be effective, weed preventers must be applied prior to seed germination. If your soil needs additional nutrients according to a soil test make your recommended application around April 1st or as new growth of your target grass begins.

If problem areas begin to develop get it or them identified as to cause then treat appropriately. Texas Cooperative Extension offices are open M - F, 8am - 4:30pm and you are welcome to bring samples by anytime for council. These same offices also have forms available on how to send samples with potential disease problems to the plant pathology lab for ID and recommendations. You may secure these forms on-line at; <http://dallas-tx.tamu.edu> then click on Links, <http://plantpathology.tamu.edu/> and Extension at the bottom of the page or left margin then Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab and forms. The form may be then printed.

Should a disease problem be identified treat according to recommendations with appropriate products according to label directions. Do not apply disease control aids without knowing for sure there is a pathological problem, should it be treated and what are the options.

If the grass sections in questions do not begin growing or filling in during spring and they may be lifted similar to a piece of carpet and no roots are present you may have grub damage. I doubt this is in fact your problem with a year old lawn. If you lawn's issue is a grub problem, treat next summer with appropriate products according to label directions. Grub products applied during the fall or winter are ineffective.

Prior to applying any insect pest control aid be sure to get the potential problem identified, determine if treatment is needed and what are the options? Do not automatically apply any insect control aid without following these initial recommendations.

Bottom line. By mowing frequently, applying soil nutrients if needed and watering appropriately your lawn will have less problems and your potable water usage will be reduced. This approach will help you to grow a more Water Wise and EARTH-KIND lawn plus reduce the dollar investment and potential storm water run off contamination.

If you or any reader wishes to contact my office for more information for personal council by phone on lawn, garden, landscape and other horticultural subjects the number is 214-904-3053, M - F, 8:30am - 4pm.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist Dallas County, Texas Cooperative Extension, Native Texan, Author, Columnist, Radio/TV Host is also known state wide as The Plant Groom(tm). You may send your questions to Dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net To speak directly with a Master Gardener M - F, 8:30a - 4:30P dial 214-904-3053.

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