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COMMON LAWN FUNGAL DISEASES_LEAF SPOT

This fungal disease isn't as common as most others but it can be more serious in the damage it can cause. We rarely come across it in our area. Leaf spot initially resembles drought or insect damage, and it can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference. This can pose a potential problem, though, because while watering a lawn damaged by drought conditions can improve its health, watering a lawn with leaf spot (or suddenly incurring a lot of rainfall) can actually encourage the disease to spread.



Leaf Spot and its second phase in the progression of the fungal disease, known as Melting Out, are two lawn diseases that usually occur together and have similar symptoms.

Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and tall fescue are the most susceptible to Leaf Spot and Melting Out. Fine Fescue, Creeping Bentgrass, Annual Bluegrass, Colonial Bent, Bermudagrass and Zoysiagrass are also vulnerable to Leaf Spot and Melting Out.

In our region here, Leaf Spot is a warm-weather disease, but the pathogen overwinters as dormant mycelium in infected plants and dead grass debris. Leaf spot can become evident when temperatures reach 70° F (21° C). The disease is most severe when temperatures are above 90° F (32° C) and humidity is high. Conditions of drought stress followed by lots of rain will intensify the disease.

It should be noted that Leaf Spot is not a fungal disease that will simply “go away” over time as many other fungal diseases can come and go. It's a fungal disease you definitely will want to control in its early stages. With proper care, this lawn disease isn't likely to destroy your lawn as long as you confront the disease before it reaches the roots of the grass blades. In its early stages the disease is quite treatable. However, if it is not controlled quickly, and it's already in its “melting out” phase, it can do significant damage and even destroy lawns.

Here are some of the key identifying signs that your grass may be suffering from Leaf Spot and Melting Out. These are progressive signs and as the fungus increases its infection, the “Melting Out” disease takes over:

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- General symptoms are spotted or wilted grass typically occurring during the months of May, June, July, August, and September.
- From a distance, infected turf will appear as diffused areas of tan, off-color grass.
- But more specifically, the grass blades will develop small, dark brown or black spots or lesions.
- As the diseases progress, the lesions enlarge and develop light tan centers with dark brown or dark purplish-red borders.
- In warmer temperatures (> 85° F / > 29° C), the leaf tissue surrounding the enlarged spots begins to yellow, and the entire blade often appears dry and straw colored.
- The disease is mostly confined to the leaf blades during the cool weather, but as the melting-out disease progresses, the fungus can infect the leaf sheaths, crowns and roots during hot, humid weather.
- Leaf tissues, such as the leaf sheaths, crowns, rhizomes, and stolons, begin to rot and turn reddish-brown. This phase often results in dead grass.

COMMON CAUSES

- These diseases are most active during cool, wet weather in spring as well as in warm, wet conditions in summer.
- Extended periods of wetness wherein the lawn is just not being able to get sufficiently dry
- Related to the above, watering the lawn in the evenings, which is NEVER a good idea
- And what might seem as the opposite of the above... drought stress
- Frequent and shallow watering or irrigation
- Excessive nitrogen fertilizer applied in spring
- Thick thatch layer within your lawn
- Low mowing height
- Too much shade and not enough sunlight
- Poor air circulation

PREVENTION/TREATMENT OPTIONS

To get rid of this combo of diseases, you need to implement some control measures as soon as you see symptoms appearing. If you're too late to identify them, the "melting out" may progress to the roots and crowns of your grass and then it may be too late to effectively control it.

The following good turf management practices are the best prevention for lawns infected with Leaf Spot and Melting Out:

- ✓ **It's okay to fertilize periodically with a balanced fertilizer to help stimulate growth of the grass but don't over-fertilize or use one that has excessive nitrogen in its NPK ratio.**
 - If your lawn has been identified as having this fungi, then it's better to apply fertilizer in the fall.
 - Yards that have received too much fertilizer in the the spring are more susceptible to this combo of fungal diseases.
- ✓ **Maintain proper watering or irrigation practices that don't encourage prolonged leaf wetness.**
 - Watering too often and for short periods of time encourages leaf wetness.
 - Provide deep infrequent irrigation, meaning... once a week give it a really good watering perhaps for 1 to 1½ hours which equates to about 1 inch to 1½ inches of water per week
 - The key is less frequent but deeper waterings for a longer period of time.
 - Grass that is watered deeply promotes stronger and deeper root growth, which results in healthier grass overall.
 - However, don't overwater it to the point that you have standing water and soggy soil hours later...

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- Allow the surface of the lawn to dry out between your waterings.
 - It's always best to irrigate or water your lawn in the early morning hours before 10 am.
 - This allows your grass to dry in the heat of the day and actively uptake the water while it is growing.
 - Overwatering or watering late in the day can cause the lawn to stay wet during the night which can make it more prone to other fungal diseases as well.
- ✓ **It's important to de-thatch (power-rake) and aerate your lawn at least once each year in the spring or fall to increase water infiltration and reduce hiding spots for the fungus.**
- Remove thatch that exceeds a 1/2" thick layer.
 - A thin thatch layer is good for the lawn, but a thick layer is attractive to fungi.
 - Dethatching and aeration will reduce soil compaction and allow oxygen, water and nutrients to move deeper into the soil, encouraging deeper and stronger grass roots... It will also promote water drainage during rainy conditions.
- ✓ **Mow on a regular schedule and properly.**
- Do not mow in the morning while your grass is still wet from the dew or the previous night's watering (though you shouldn't be watering in the evening).
 - This will likely spread the disease further.
 - Mow the lawn once the surface moisture has evaporated.
 - Also, avoid mowing during wet weather.
 - Freshly mowed grass typically needs a day to repair the cut.
 - If the grass is wet, disease can easily enter the blades along with the water that enters the wound.
 - Further to the above, make sure your mower blade is always sharp.
 - A dull mower will cause damage to grass blades.
 - The shredded grass blade does not heal well and is easily infected by disease.
 - Avoid scalping your lawn by mowing too low... Maintain your lawn at 2½ to 3½ inches in height.
 - Ideally, mow frequently enough so that only 1/3 of the leaf blade is removed each time.
 - Mowing the lawn too short, stresses the grass and exposes its crowns and roots to potential infection.
 - Grass that is slightly longer will also help discourage weeds and browning.
 - Further to the above, be mindful that if you wait too long and then cut it quite low, this will stress your lawn, and it can potentially go into a state of shock, making the lawn more disease susceptible.
 - Also, be sure to bag any grass clippings to prevent any further fungal spread.
- ✓ **Apply fungicides at the first signs of leaf spot.**
- NOTE: The secret to keeping fungal diseases out of your lawn isn't necessarily fungicide — Good lawn care is always the best prevention. Fungicides can certainly help, but they shouldn't be the only method you rely on. Fungicides might combat diseases, but they do not build your lawn's strength and resilience. It's only good lawn maintenance that can improve your lawn's health, and the healthier your grass is, the less susceptible it will be to disease.
 - Both contact and systemic fungicides can be used to manage leaf spot.
 - However, application timing is crucial... They are only effective when applied to infected lawns at the onset of early disease symptoms.
 - If a fungicide is applied during the subsequent "melting out" stage, it will have little to no effect.
 - However, fungicides may help prevent leaf spot from spreading to other areas of the lawn.
 - Ideally, fungicides should be applied in the early spring as soon as you see any signs of the disease appearing.
 - Contact fungicides like chlorothalonil and maneb, must be applied every 7-10 days to be effective.

- Systemic fungicides like iprodione and the Qol's, can be applied on 14-21 day schedules.
- Fungicides containing mancozeb, fludioxonil, azoxystrobin, myclobutanil, penthiopyrad may also provide good leaf spot control.
 - Be aware that some fungicides that may be available in the U.S. may not be available within Canada.

*** GENERAL USAGE DISCLAIMER ***

Please note that some of the above illustrative photos are SQLC's, and some may not be. Our photos will be tagged as such. We do not claim ownership of every photo within this document. Nor does our inclusion of them, mean that any rightful owners of these photos necessarily agree with or endorse what we've written within this document. We therefore give credit to those who may be the original owners of these photos --- We've seen them likewise displayed on numerous lawn care websites without links to the original sources, so we're honestly not sure who may be the original photographers. That being said, if anyone wants to use our SQLC photos, they may do so, too, as we're totally fine with that --- Our purpose is nothing more than wanting to educate you about such lawn diseases. We gratefully acknowledge that the following photos, no matter who took them, are some near-perfect examples of various fungal diseases. Whoever photographed them, did so at the perfect time to clearly indicate the main and most obvious symptoms of the diseases --- Our hats go off to them for a job very well done. In utilizing them, we simply wanted to give you the best possible photographic examples of what these particular lawn diseases would look like, to help you identify and know what you're dealing with.

***** SPECIAL NOTE *****

We love helping our clients have great-looking lawns! Of course, we always welcome your inquiries, but we also want to help educate you, too. So many of you have told us how much you appreciate the articles we make available to you.

If there are any questions you may have about your lawn or any challenges or problems you may occasionally encounter with your lawn, don't hesitate to give us a call. As with the above info article you've just read, we also have other highly beneficial lawn care articles, too...

Here are some we've created to support you with your lawn care efforts. They can help you identify any problems as well as offer some possible solutions for some of those occasional challenges lawns can encounter.

These info articles are not meant to be one-time definitive cures for whatever might ail your lawn. We all wish it was only that simple... But, there are no magic "spray this once and your lawn will be perfect thereafter" solutions... Unfortunately, those don't really exist, as much as we might all like them to. However, there are many things you can do to get your lawn in great shape and keep it that way. We encourage you to glean what you can from any of the following articles that may interest you. And for what you're not sure about, give us a call, let's talk about it, and we'll do what we can to help you.

You may reach us at 780-678-6450 if you'd like to receive any of these via email. It would be our pleasure to do our part to help you "make your lawn the envy of your neighbours"...

...See list of available articles on next page...

"Your Home Turf Advantage"

From Our **“PROACTIVE LAWN CARE”** Series Of Articles —

7 Steps To A Great Lawn

Caring For Our Lawn Over The Winter

Proactively Preparing Your Lawn For Drought Conditions

From Our **“WHAT YOU’RE NOT TOLD”** Series Of Articles —

What You’re Not Told About All-Natural & Organic Lawn Care Alternatives

What You’re Not Told About Bats & Their Guano

From Our **“WHY?”** Series Of Articles —

Why Is My Grass So Thin?

Why Dead Spots On My Lawn?

Why Am I Getting Mushrooms In My Lawn?

Why Are The Pine Needles Killing My Grass?

From Our **“HOW TO GET RID OF...”** Series Of Articles —

How To Get Rid of Ants

How To Get Rid of Dew Worms

How To Get Rid of Fairy Rings

How To Get Rid of Quackgrass

How To Get Rid of Thistles

From Our **“DAMAGE BY DOGS & OTHER CRITTERS”** Series of Articles —

Fixing & Preventing Dog Spots

Damage Caused by Voles

From Our **“SEEDING LAWNS”** Series Of Articles —

Grass Seeding For New Lawns

Overseeding For Existing Lawns

From Our **“DIY”** Series Of Articles —

DIY_Alternate Ways To Remove Weeds In Gravel Areas

From Our **“COMMON LAWN FUNGAL DISEASES”** Series Of Articles —

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases (Compendium Of All Common Ones)

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_The Usual Causes

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Snow Mold

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Leaf Spot & Melting Out

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Ascochyta Turf Leaf Blight

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Brown Patch

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Summer Patch

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Pythium Blight

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Red Thread

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Rust Diseases

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Powdery Mildew

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Dollar Spot

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Fairy Ring

...See more on next page...

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INFORMATION ON OUR FIVE PRIMARY LAWN CARE SERVICES —

FERTILIZER & WEED CONTROL:

Our Fertilization & Weed Control Program
Possible Reasons For Still Having Weeds
Ten Reasons Our Program is Different

ENRICH SOIL ENHANCER:

Our Enrich Soil Enhancer Program
Different Soil Types Have Different pH Levels

WEEKLY MOWING:

How The Weekly Lawn Mowing Works
Our Quality Control Program
Ten Reasons We Are Different

CORE AERATION:

Why Aerate Your Lawn?

POWER RAKING:

Why Power-Rake Your Lawn?

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