

The Fungus Among-Us

by Troy Smith, Palo Pinto Master Gardener

It has been a tough season battling weeds and pest in our turf lawns this year! And we are finally getting to enjoy the fruits of our labors with a plush thick, deep green, “nearly” weed free turf that we like to peer over our grills and admire on a Saturday afternoon in the backyard with friends.

Over by the edge there appears to be a dry spot.

The extreme temperature of this time of season. It’s just been so hot! Perhaps it’s a sprinkler head issue....

Mosey over to investigate.

Checking the nearby heads seems to show good application of water. So turn up the time to give it a bigger drink. And heck, might as well throw some fertilizer on it too. After all, it has been a hot dry summer.

So now all week extra water has been pumping to that area, melting all that nitrogen into the soil. Then on the next Saturday morning, when grass cutting time rolls around, you step out on the back porch with coffee to observe the day’s chore ahead and notice that the one little brown spot has now streaked across the yard!

Congratulations! It’s most likely the Brown Patch!!!

It is a fungal infection that thrives on turf grasses. Water and nitrogen are its fuel to multiply! And once you have it, you have it for life....

Now that it’s here. How do we stop this ugly monster from raising its ugly head year after year?

The answer to that is good cultural practices in your lawn care program. Keep watering to a very minimum, as fungi like moisture.

Water deep and less often. Avoid watering when water will remain on the surface for longer than 8-10 hours

When fertilizing, try to use a minimal amount of nitrogen to acquire the desired texture of the turf. High nitrogen will accelerate the production of spores.

One could go with chemical warfare and use systemic fungicides, which are effective. If you take that route, be sure to switch between the different fungicides that have different modes of operation, as the spores will begin to develop an immunity to just one mode of operation.