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To: Rains County Leader

Lawn Diseases: What to look for and can they be controlled?

The relatively cool weather, rain, and high humidity mean great growing conditions for fungal diseases in turfgrass, trees, and shrubs. Now is the time to be on the lookout for any changes in your plants. Be aware that fungal diseases can strike overnight and can do serious problems rapidly.

Diseases in warm season turfgrasses such as St. Augustinegrass, Bermudagrass, Buffalograss, and Zoysiagrass usually occur during the spring and fall seasons when it is cool and wet (humid). This doesn't mean that they cannot occur during the summer. If the environmental conditions are right, these fungus problems can hit you when you least expect it. Brown patch, gray leaf spot, helminthosporium leaf spot, downy mildew, dollar spot, and take-all root rot are just a few of the diseases. A person can take one of three approaches: treat with a preventative fungicide in the early spring and early fall, wait until the disease hits then treat with a contact fungicide, or do nothing at all. The specific disease and its severity should dictate your approach.

First, monitor your turfgrass for unusual patterns or stressed areas. Next, have the turfgrass analyzed to determine a proper identification of the disease or problem. Then, apply the correct fungicide at the appropriate rate to ensure efficacy of the treatment. Sequential treatments may be needed, depending on the disease and fungicide used. Remember, improper water and nutrient management as well as other cultural practices can enhance disease development. Water deeply and infrequently and use only the appropriate amount of fertilizer required to maintain a quality, healthy turfgrass.

Where trees and shrubs are concerned you need to look out for powdery mildew. Typically powdery mildew will not kill the entire plant, but it can be very unsightly and will set the plants back.

Symptoms are often seen as superficial white to light-gray colored powdery spots of the fungus over the surface of leaves, stems, buds or flowers of affected plants. Eventually these areas may enlarge until they cover the entire leaf, branch or stem. In many cases the fungus causes chlorosis or necrosis of infected tissues. Young foliage and shoots are especially susceptible to infection of powdery mildew. Other symptoms may include dwarfing, leaf curling, twisting and premature senescence. Severe powdery mildew infection will result in dried and brown leaves as well as disfigured shoots and flowers. Although it usually is not a fatal disease, powdery mildew may hasten plant defoliation and fall dormancy, and the infected plant may become extremely unsightly.

Chemical control has played a major role in reducing powdery mildew infections and disease spread. Systemic fungicides including fenarimol (Rubigan), myclobutanil (Eagle, Immunox), propiconazole (Banner), thiophanatemethyl (Accost, Bayleton), and triadimefon (Bayleton, Strike) and triforine (Triforine, Funginex) provide good control. Additionally, protectant fungicides such as chlorothalonil (Daconil), piperali (Pipron), trinumizole (Terragard) or wettable sulfur provide good powdery mildew control. Fungicide Resistance to some of these products (systemics) have been identified. Be aware that if there is no improvement in disease control this may be due to resistance to the fungicide, consider the use of a different product.