

## **Spring Dead Spot in Bermudagrass**



Spring is officially here and the Bermudagrass is starting to green up in spite of the unseasonably cold weather we've had lately. If you are seeing dead, brown patches amongst the lovely spring green of your Bermudagrass lawn, you may have a case of Spring Dead Spot. It usually appears in overly fertilized lawns, so the "more is not better" rule of fertilizer rule definitely applies here.



Spring Dead Spot in Bermudagrass with weeds.

Spring Dead Spot is a common problem in Bermudagrass. In Oklahoma, clearly defined patches of dead grass show up in early spring, usually in April. Patches can be sunken or depressed, circular, semi-circular or arc shaped. Some are only a few inches across, and some are a yard or more in diameter.

These patches are perennial and may change size and shape from year to year. The Bermudagrass leaves are straw colored or bleached looking compared to healthy grass. The roots and runners will be dark, almost black. Because the Bermudagrass is not healthy, weeds may grow in the dead spot area.



Two fungi, *Ophiosphaerella herpotricha* and *Ophiosphaerella korrae*, both commonly found in Oklahoma cause Spring Dead Spot. Introducing infected plants or infested soil spreads it. Pets and other animals, running water, dirty tools and even people can spread these fungi. Infection usually begins in late September and continues as long as soil temperatures are above 50 degrees, but we do not usually see the damage until the following spring. Over fertilizing Bermudagrass, especially in the fall, makes it more susceptible to Spring Dead Spot because high nitrogen levels increase fungal growth.

Symptomatic areas can be dug, and the soil and plant material removed when they first appear. Be sure to clean your tools afterward to keep from spreading the fungi to other areas. Avoid aerating or de-thatching in the spring as this can spread the disease as well. Wait until summer when these activities can help reduce the severity of the infestation.

Fungicides applied in the fall can help but Spring Dead Spot may not be evident until spring. Do not fertilize Bermudagrass after September 15th in our area.

Good cultural practices are the best way to prevent Spring Dead Spot. Balanced soil fertility will make for healthy Bermudagrass that is more resistant to fungi and weeds. If you are unsure of your soil nutrients, take a soil sample to the OSU Tulsa Extension Office to have it tested by OSU to see if you need to add fertilizer. Detailed instructions on taking a soil sample and having it tested are on our website at [www.tulsamastergardeners.org](http://www.tulsamastergardeners.org).

You can get answers to all your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701, by e-mailing us at [mg@tulsamastergardeners.org](mailto:mg@tulsamastergardeners.org), or by visiting our Diagnostic Center at 4116 East 15<sup>th</sup> Street in Tulsa.

## **Sources:**

- OSU Extension Service Fact Sheet [EPP-7665](http://EPP-7665) (Spring Dead Spot of Bermudagrass)
- Clemson University Extension Home and Garden Information Center