TURF DISEASE MANAGEMENT

One of the biggest challenges you can face while taking care of a lawn is disease pressure. Turf diseases can be tricky to deal with because many of them look like other issues. Many diseases look the same as drought stress and insect damage. The best way to handle turf diseases is to use the proper cultural practices and apply preventative fungicides. It is better to prevent diseases than try to get rid of them once they are established.

There are some cultural practices that will help you stay ahead of disease issues. Start with monitoring the amount and timing of the irrigation for the lawn. Lawns should only be watered 3 times per week under normal conditions. Start the irrigation cycle early in the morning. Having the irrigation system finish by 7:00am - 8:00am will allow the water to be absorbed by the grass with little evaporation and will also give the blades all day to dry off. Turf diseases thrive in wet conditions. Over watering and prolonged leaf blade wetness will allow disease to take hold and thrive.

Managing the amount of thatch is also important. The thatch layer of a lawn is made up of dead plant tissue such as clippings. This layer is the perfect place for disease to incubate. Thatch layers should be ½ an inch thick or less. Some thatch is good for the lawn as it returns some organic matter back to the soil. However, excessive thatch will reduce airflow and keep the soil and leaf blade too wet allowing diseases to thrive. A simple dethatching once per year will help keep the thatch in check.

Proper fertilization is another important factor that you can control to reduce the amount of disease pressure you will face. Using 100% synthetic fertilizers without slow release nitrogen help feed many diseases. Use low to moderate amounts of Nitrogen especially in the hot and humid summer months and make sure there is plenty of slow release Nitrogen in the bag. Slow release Nitrogen takes longer to break down allowing for a longer feed using lower amounts of Nitrogen at one time. Slow release Nitrogen comes in several forms. It is up to you which form you use. There is Sulfur coated Urea, Polymer coated Urea, and Organic sources of Nitrogen. Sulfur coated means that the Urea prill is coated in Sulfur which needs to be broken down before the Urea can be used. Polymer coated Urea is a Polymer around a Urea prill. When water hits the polymer coat it liquifies the Urea inside and allows it to seep out. The amount of Urea that is released depends on the thickness of the polymer. Organic sources of Nitrogen such as bone meal and blood meal are great sources of both organic matter and slow release Nitrogen. There are considerably lower levels of Nitrogen in these sources. They are best used alongside synthetic sources of Nitrogen.

After you follow the cultural practices you can put down preventative fungicides. 3 applications of a broad spectrum fungicide spaced out every 14-21 days will cover you for most of the season. If the season continues to be hot, humid, and rainy you will have to continue making fungicide applications until conditions break. Use fungicides with different modes of action to reduce resistance issues. Look at the label and make sure the category of the fungicide is different. You can do repeat applications of fungicides as long as they are not consecutive. This is the best way to cover yourself for as many diseases as possible while reducing the amount of resistance.