

LAWN PROBLEMS

Q & A 08.22.2016

What is wrong with my lawn? The lawn doesn't seem to be growing much and isn't very green. It has brown patches. It hasn't mowed in two months. It is watered every day for 10 minutes.

ANSWER:

Your lawn may be affected by one or more problems, including: water, fertilizer, thatching/aerating, insects, and or diseases.

Water:

The main cause of dead areas in lawns is usually due to lack of water or overwatering. It is best to water lawns deeply and less frequently (maybe 3 times per week). Water when the top 2 inches are dry. Use a screwdriver or other tool to dig into the lawn to examine the moisture in the soil. The best time to water is between 2 and 8 in the morning, to reduce water loss from evaporation. (The light application of water on a daily basis can make your lawn less vigorous.)

Fertilizer:

Based on your photo that you submitted, it appears that your lawn is a tall fescue, which is a cool season turfgrass. Cool season grasses grow the most vigorously in the spring and fall. Those seasons are the best time to apply fertilizer to cool season grasses. Most years you only need to apply nitrogen, since there will probably be sufficient phosphorus, potassium, and other nutrients in the soil. If it has been awhile since you have fertilized your lawn, you may want to apply a complete lawn fertilizer with nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Fertilize each month during the fall and spring (September, October, November, March, April, May) with 0.5 to 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet of lawn, this works out to about 5 pounds of actual fertilizer per 1000 square feet depending on how much nitrogen it contains. Water deeply a few days before, and fertilize when the grass is dry. If you grasscycle (leave the grass clippings on the lawn when you mow) you'll take care of 20% of your fertilizer needs.

Dethatch and Aerate:

Thatch is a buildup of organic matter (old grass) that hasn't decomposed. It can be removed with a dethatcher or verticutter (a mower with vertical blades). If the soil is compacted, aerate the lawn after dethatching. An aerator removes plugs of lawn and dirt, which loosens the soil and allows water to percolate deeper into the soil.

Disease and Insects:

A stressed lawn from drought, soil compaction, and/or heavy thatch is more susceptible to disease and insect damage. If you believe that insects are the problem, you should conduct a “drench test” Direction for this test can be found at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/TOOLS/TURF/PESTS/indrench.html>). The drench test should force underlying insects to the surface of your lawn so that you can identify them and manage them appropriately

Reseeding:

A lawn that isn't too far gone can be helped by overseeding in the fall. First get rid of weeds. If you use herbicides, use them at least 30 days before seeding. Closely mow the lawn and remove clippings. Thoroughly rake to loosen the surface.

Broadcast seed throughout the lawn, applying more in bare areas. Apply starter fertilizer at the same time. Schedule sprinklers to provide light irrigation that keeps the soil moist until the new grass is established.