

January Round-table Meeting MY LAWN IS TURNING RED

Near the end of the meeting there was a question about a lawn turning red. Time constraints prohibited further discussion.

In the Pacific NW there are six common lawn diseases: fusarium (*Microdochium*) patch, take-all patch, fairy ring, red thread, rusts and necrotic ring spot. Three of them are associated with red or pink changes in the lawn. Lawn diseases are more common in poorly drained lawns, those with compacted soil, heavy thatch loads, thick moss growth, under overhanging tree branches, poor aeration and so on. Correction of these problems is a necessary part of both disease prevention and management.

Red Thread (*Laetisaria fuciformis*, a fungal disease). One stage is marked by thin, red, needle-like strands extending from the grass blades. In the other stage there are small, pink, cotton wool-like mycelium where the blades of grass meet. Brown patches appear in the lawn, most commonly in late summer and the fall. The grass is rarely killed completely if remedial action is taken. The application of nitrogen with a balanced N-P-K supplement to affected areas is usually sufficient to control the disease. Late fall applications of proper fall type lawn fertilizers are especially important. Grass cuttings should be disposed of to reduce the risk of re-infecting the lawn. Good soil husbandry is a must.



Rust is also a fungal disease (*Puccinia* spp.) of lawns that usually develops in late summer or fall. Individual blades of grass turn yellow with red-brown pustules on the leaf surface. Shoes and clothing can be coated in a reddish powder full of spores. Like red thread, rust does not usually kill the grass. As with red thread good soil maintenance is a cornerstone of prevention and control. Grass clippings should be disposed of. Maintain lawn vigour with regular lawn feeding in the growing season. Increase the amount of nitrogen applied during the growing season. Avoid the application of nitrogen in the fall, unless in the form of fall type lawn fertilizer. Fungicides are rarely required.



Fusarium Patch (now called *Monographella nivalis*) is a fungal disease that thrives in cool wet conditions. Small yellow patches appear in lawn in fall and mild winters. The patches enlarge and turn brown and may appear pink at the margins of the patch. Unlike red thread and rust, fusarium patch is a very damaging disease of turf grass and can be difficult to control. Prevention is the key. Good air circulation, excellent soil husbandry and avoidance of high dose nitrogen fertilizers in late summer and fall are mainstays. The fungicide triadimefon may be applied twice in the spring and twice in the fall.

References: Royal Horticultural Society, Washington State University Extension, Purdue University Extension.

Lynn Doyle (Master Gardener)