

## Problems that can lead to lawn damage

A beautiful lawn is a goal for many homeowners. Some homeowners may find that lovely lawns may last momentarily, only to disappear when damage - be it pest-, weather- or child-related - sets in.

While well-established turf can be resilient, even the most well-maintained lawns can be vulnerable. Preventing lawn damage first involves getting to the root of the problem.

- **Lack of sunlight:** All plants need the proper ratio of sunlight to grow. Too much sunlight and plant blades can scorch. Too little sunlight and grass may turn brown and die. Although there are shade-tolerant varieties of grass, homeowners also can explore alternative landscapes. Work in a garden bed or create a design that utilizes gravel or mulch. Avoid aggressively pruning back trees to give the lawn more sunlight in that area, as this may just damage the trees.

- **Chemical spills:** Gasoline and fertilizer spills and pesticide applications in high concentrations can cause

the lawn to yellow or brown in spots. Carefully refill lawn gas tanks and fertilizer spreaders on the sidewalk or driveway to avoid overflow onto the lawn. If spills occur, flood the area promptly with water to dilute.

- **Foot traffic:** Lawns can take a pounding from foot traffic, leading to compaction and spots of dead lawn. Try to redirect the traffic elsewhere to give worn down areas a break. Aeration can relieve soil compaction. If a certain area has become the de facto pathway, install a paver, gravel or concrete walkway in that spot.

- **Debris:** Leaving a tool, kids' toys, piece of wood, or any debris on the lawn can quickly suffocate the grass beneath and cause the lawn to die quickly. Make sure that no items are left on the lawn for an extended period of time.

- **Mowing patterns:** Running the mower in the same pattern over and over can cause ruts in the grass that lead to damage, so avoid mowing in the same direction on consecutive cuts.

Avoid mowing on very hot days or when the lawn is soggy. Both can cause tracks to form in the lawn.

- **Mowers:** Dull lawn mower blades can damage lawns, as can mowing too fast. Grass blades can be torn, snapped and more, resulting in brown spots.

- **Wildlife:** Animals and insects can destroy turf roots. Animals or insects may feed on the grass from underneath its surface, compromising the lawn's ability to procure nutrients and water. Animals like moles or raccoons may feed on grubs in the lawn, and treating for grubs can alleviate torn-up turf.

Lawns can be hearty, but they're also highly susceptible to damage. Even seemingly harmless things can compromise the integrity of a lawn. Understanding the causes of lawn damage can help homeowners protect their lawns.

## Treating

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- **Pull weeds by hand instead of applying herbicides.** Herbicides are substances used to destroy unwanted vegetation, such as weeds. When applied during droughts or dry periods, such products can make it harder for grass to overcome weeds. Instead of applying herbicides during drought or dry periods, pull weeds by hand. Doing so can address a weed problem without harming the grass.

- **Water early.** Water restrictions might not completely deny homeowners the right to water their lawns. Rather, such regulations restrict how much water homeowners can use to treat their lawns during drought or dry periods. Watering early, ideally between the hours of 4 a.m. and 8 a.m., ensures as little water as possible will be lost to evaporation and as much as possible will find its way onto the grass and into the soil. During periods of drought, temperatures

## How to control common spring pests

Just when winter thaws out and people are anxious to enjoy the blooming flowers and luscious lawns of spring, pesky pests can appear and impact comfort levels and safety.

Many pests resume their levels of activity as spring draws closer and temperatures warm up. The presence of these insects and rodents may cause problems in and around a home, which makes it essential to recognize them and avoid issues. The following are some of the more common spring pests and how to remedy infestations.

### Pavement ants

Pavement ants are some of the most common pests residents encounter inside and outside of their homes. These ants are light brown to black with appendages that are lighter

than the rest of their bodies. Small in stature, pavement ants have parallel lines on their heads and thorax, according to pest extermination company Orkin.

Although pavement ants nest outdoors, they can enter homes through small crevices in search of food scraps. Their large colonies may not disappear until treatment is introduced. Keep foods in tightly sealed containers, clear counters and floors of crumbs, and address water sources, such as leaks. Pesticides may be needed in extreme conditions.

### Fleas

Fleas are tiny, jumping, biting pests that must find a host upon which to live. As ectoparasites, they feed on blood while living on the body of living hosts. Pets can bring fleas inside the yard and home in warm weather. According to the University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program, flea larvae develop more quickly at higher temperatures. At normal room temperatures, the entire life cycle of a flea is about 18 days.

Several flea control products are available to control fleas on cats and dogs. There also may be powders and sprays to alleviate flea infestations in the home. Vacuuming is also very effective in killing larvae in the carpet and at picking up adults.

tend to be at their highest in mid- to late-afternoon, so change automatic sprinkler timers if they are set to water during these hours.

- **Adjust lawnmower blade height.** Grass grows more slowly during drought or dry periods. As a result, homeowners won't need to mow as often during such times as they would when conditions are more favorable. But lawns may still need to be mowed during drought. When mowing, leave grass on the longer side. Mowing stresses grass, which is already under considerable stress during drought. By setting mower blades to cut no more than one-third of the leaf blade at a time, homeowners can encourage roots to grow deeper. Deep roots help the grass combat the effects of drought.

Drought and dry periods need not ruin homeowners' lush lawns. But lawn care enthusiasts will have to alter their lawn care routines when conditions are dry.

### Wasps

An errant wasp, hornet or yellow jacket may have survived winter and ridden out the colder temperatures within a home. Once the weather warms, queens will begin to look for places to lay eggs and establish colonies. Treating areas where wasps are seen entering and leaving the home is key. Seal holes as soon as possible.

Although wasps help control other insect populations, their painful stings and potentially aggressive nature can make them challenging to have around a home. If a nest is found, hire a professional to remove it.

### Spiders

Many spiders are not harmful enough to humans and pets to be much of a problem. In fact, spiders can be helpful to have around to control the populations of other insects. Still, many homeowners would prefer these web-slinging friends remain outdoors. Therefore, sealing cracks in a home's foundation and repairing small openings around windows and doors can help keep spiders out. Also, alleviating moisture issues in basements, garages or attics may keep out other bugs that would be prey to spiders.

Homeowners can take the steps necessary to cut down on pests in and around their homes.



Ants are a nuisance that become more active as the weather warms.

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