

Keep your lawn green and healthy all season long

By MELINDA MYERS
Special to The Messenger

A healthy lawn is your best defense against lawn diseases and other problems. But when the weather favors the disease more than your lawn, problems can occur.

Reduce the risk of disease by keeping your lawn healthy. Mow high to encourage deeply rooted grass that is more drought tolerant and resistant to disease problems. Water early in the day so the grass leaves, blades, dry quickly and less water is lost to evaporation.

Apply the right type and amount of fertilizer at the proper time to limit the risk of disease. Regular fertilization, three to four times per year, encourages better results since most soils do not contain the essential nutrients for optimum growth.

Avoid high nitrogen quick release fertilizers

that promote lush succulent growth that is more susceptible to disease. Instead use a low nitrogen slow release fertilizer like Milorganite (milorganite.com) that promotes steady growth that's more drought tolerant and resistant to disease.

Monitor lawns for Brown Patch when temperatures and humidity rise and grass remains wet for long periods of time. Infected lawns will have somewhat circular patches of thin light brown grass. Look for white cottony strands of fungal mycelium early in the morning on dew covered lawns. Check grass blades for small irregular tan spots with dark brown borders on the individual grass blades. Avoid heavy fertilization with fast release fertilizer in early spring and summer.

Look for dollar size to six-inch diameter spots of bleached or light tan grass if you suspect Dollar Spot. Infected leaves have white

SEASONAL LAWN DISEASE GUIDE											
WARM SEASON GRASS											
	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	
BROWN PATCH											
DOLLAR SPOT											
LEAF SPOTS											
RUST											

lesions with reddish tan margins that often resemble an hourglass. Over and under fertilization, drought, water on the grass blades for extended time and mowing too low all increase the risk of this disease.

Closely examine lawns with a reddish hue to confirm the presence of rust disease. Rust infected lawns are covered with an orange or yellowish powder, the fungal spores, that can leave an orange residue on your shoes. Newly seeded and lawns weakened by

inadequate fertilization and drought are most susceptible.

Stay alert for leaf spot diseases that can attack lawns. Avoid excess fertilization and watering late afternoon and evenings.

Once you discover a disease, visit Milorganite.com for more detailed information and photos to help with diagnosis. Correct your lawn care practices to speed recovery and avoid problems in the future. Proper care and reseeding dead areas with disease-

resistant grass varieties is usually enough to manage the disease. Be sure you need a fungicide before applying. These chemicals are costly, the results can be disappointing and when used improperly they can be harmful to pollinators and the environment.

Further speed recovery with a change in mowing habits. Continue to mow high but cut the healthy portions of your lawn first. Then cut the grass in the diseased areas. Once done, use a disinfectant to clean

the mower blades then rinse with clear water. This along with collecting and disposing of clippings from the diseased areas of the lawn reduces the risk of spreading the disease next time you mow.

Provide proper care and monitor your lawn throughout the growing season. Discovering problems early means better results with less effort on your part.

Editor's note: Melinda Myers has written over 20 books, including "Small Space Gardening" and the Perfect Lawn series. She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" DVD series and the nationally syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment TV and radio segments. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine and was commissioned by Milorganite for her expertise to write this article. Myers' website is www.melindamyers.com.

Clues to determine and deter unwanted animals in your yard and garden

Holmes and Watson, Riggs and Murtaugh, Star-sky and Hutch — when it comes to sleuthing out just what critter is munching on your spring garden, you may feel like your partnership with Mother Nature is as contentious as any that ever graced the big, or small screen. After all, how are you supposed to fight the “crime” of a decimated garden if you can’t identify the suspect who’s been devouring your daylilies?

And while Mother Nature may happily grace your garden with rain, warmth and sunshine, she may not always be on the same team when it comes to keeping critters out of your gardens and landscapes. Foraging pests can destroy your yard, literally overnight.

It is possible to thwart garden thieves, but first you have to know what animals have been dining on your plants and shrubs. Once you’ve identified the culprits, you can settle on effective animal repellents that



will persuade pests to leave your garden alone. Here are some facts to get your detective work under way:

Devouring deer: Ragged bites, typically a foot or more above the ground indicate deer damage. Deer are notorious for devouring gardens and landscapes. You’ll see them, and their offspring, every year, making dinner of your daisies, daylilies and other ornamental plants.

Ravenous rabbits: If plant damage is low to the ground — a few inches above the soil — and includes stems clipped cleanly at an angle, you’re probably dealing with rabbits. These four-legged foragers will eat just about any kind of vegetation, including your fab-

ulous flowers, bushes and other woody plants. If you don’t want bunnies nesting and raising families near your garden, remove brush and other debris that could provide them with shelter.

Voracious voles: When flower bulbs disappear from the ground or plant roots go missing, chances are you have voles — mouse-like creatures that burrow underground and that are highly destructive to gardens. Exit holes are further indications that voles are tunneling under your garden. Teeth marks around the base of trees, droppings or trails in the grass can also indicate the presence of voles.

Greedy groundhogs: Mounds of dirt beside burrow entrances are a sure

sign of groundhogs, a garden pest that eats just about every type of green plant. Groundhogs can destroy a garden. These solitary herbivores live in burrows underground.

Capricious chipmunks: The on-screen antics of Chip and Dale might charm your children, but the presence of chipmunks in your garden is nothing but bad news. Damage to flower bulbs, plant shoots and leaves, uprooted plants and dug-up roots are all signs you have chipmunks. Their underground burrows may be a challenge to spot since the entrances are usually only about two inches in diameter and not surrounded by noticeable dirt mounds. You can curtail their activity by removing yard debris where chipmunks hide.

Salacious squirrels: While you might think of them as mostly the enemy of anyone with a bird feeder, squirrels can also cause damage to gardens. They live in colonies, dig-

ging underground tunnels and mounds in grassy areas and around trees that can lay waste to gardens and landscapes.

Once you’ve identified the culprits assaulting your garden, you’ll need the right tools to take care of them. Most traditional pest-control measures — row covers, netting, noise deterrents, predator urine or even human hair strewn around the yard — simply don’t work. Fences can do the job, but they’re expensive and you may live in a community that restricts the type and height of fences you can erect.

Some small animal repellents, however, do work. Bobbex-R is all-natural, environmentally friendly and proven effective at protecting ornamental plantings from small, four-legged garden critters. In testing by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, the product — which works through smell and taste aversion — received a 100 percent efficacy rat-



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