HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET

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Snow Molds of Turfgrass

Winter diseases of turfgrasses are sometimes associated with melting snow or cold wet periods. Bluegrasses, fine fescues, tall fescues and perennial ryegrasses may be attacked, but bentgrasses are most susceptible. Two diseases, Typhula Blight (gray snow mold) and Fusarium Patch (pink snow mold), occur in New York and may occur alone or together. Since different fungicides are used to control each of these diseases, it is necessary to distinguish between them.

Symptoms

Typhula Blight or gray snow mold, caused by *Typhula incarnata* and related species, is a true snow mold and appears as roughly circular bleached patches up to 2 feet in diameter. The infected grass may be matted and surrounded by a white to gray halo of fluffy fungal growth soon after the snow melts.

Examination of the diseased plants reveals tiny tan or brown spherical bodies (sclerotia) on or imbedded in infected leaves. The severity of the disease will vary, and it is particularly severe when turf has been subjected to a prolonged deep compacted snow cover. Although the disease is unsightly, it rarely causes death of the grass.

Fusarium Patch or pink snow mold caused by *Fusarium nivale*, produces similar-looking patches. In contrast to Typhula Blight, a pinkish cast might be observed under wet conditions, and no tan sclerotia are associated with diseased plant tissue. This disease can become severe when turf is subjected to prolonged periods of cool, wet weather from early autumn to late spring, and it does not require snow cover for development as Typhula Blight does.

A severe infection by *Fusarium nivale* may cause the rotting of the turfgrass crowns and, therefore, the death of the turfgrass. Pink snow mold is worst when snow covers unfrozen ground.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Considerations

IPM is a common sense approach to pest control and plant care. It employs a number of measures to prevent, control or reduce plant problems. These include using resistant plant varieties, proper plant selection and placement, good aftercare and biological and/or mechanical controls. As a last resort, after all other remedies have been explored, a pesticide* that is least toxic to people and natural predators, can be considered. Prior to using any pesticides, plants should always be monitored for the degree of infestation and a sensible control measure considered.

** A pesticide is a substance that kills, or attempts to kill, a particular pest, e.g.* ***insect****icide,* ***fung****icide,* ***herb****icide, etc.*

Cultural Control

Both diseases can be culturally reduced by avoiding mid-fall (October) applications of fertilizer which could stimulate succulent (and therefore disease-susceptible) new growth just before freezing weather begins, by continuing to mow turf as long as it continues to grow in the fall, and by avoiding compaction of snow. For gray snow mold apply heavy rates of compost to cover dormant turf. Remove excess compost in early spring before turf resumes growth. Where winter diseases have caused damage, the matted grass should be raked up in order to encourage new spring growth. For Pink Snow Mold decrease thatch and increase phosphorus. Also improve drainage. Make sure last mowing in fall doesn't leave long matted grass.If reseeding areas where these diseases have been a problem, consider using turfgrass varieties which exhibit some resistance to infection. The following varieties have tolerance to Pink Snow Mold: Kentucky bluegrasses: Flyking, Nassau, Shasta, Victa. Fine fescues: Biljart, Jamestown, Koket, Scaldis.

Chemical Control

Apply fungicides before long-lasting snow cover. Systemic fungicides should not be applied to dormant turf.

If the occurrence of winter diseases have been severe or wide-spread in past years, or if susceptible varieties or species are being grown, a preventative fungicide program may be necessary. It does no good to treat in spring because resting structures have already been formed.

Chemical pesticides are available. If you choose to use chemical pesticides, contact your local Cooperative Extension office for specific recommendations.

WHENEVER YOU USE A PESTICIDE, ALWAYS READ THE LABEL AND FOLLOW THE MANUFACTURER'S INSTRUCTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

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