



## **Drought Not the Only Cause of Brown Spots in Lawns:**

Large brown spots in stressed home lawns unfortunately are common throughout Texas this summer. Most can be attributed to heat and drought, but homeowners need to be aware of insects and diseases at work, especially in late summer and early fall.

"Most lawns should recover from extended drought when rain and cooler weather arrive this fall," said Dr. James McAfee, turfgrass specialist at the Texas A&M Research and Extension Center in Dallas. "However, if the damage is caused by insects or disease, they may not. Homeowners should check carefully to make sure the problem is only moisture-related.

"So, how do you tell what's causing the damage?" asked McAfee. "If grubs are present, the turf will pull up easily because they have chewed off most of the roots. Also, you should find the white C- shaped grubs in the soil under the brown spots. If drought is the cause, the turfgrass will be firmly anchored to the soil and not pulled up readily. If you find grubs, apply an appropriate insecticide as soon as possible. Water it into the lawn thoroughly without letting the water run off."

Chinch bugs primarily attack St. Augustine grass, he said, but they also can damage Bermuda, centipede and zoysia lawns. McAfee suggested looking for them by getting on your hands and knees in your lawn. Chinch bugs are small and slender, 1/5 to 1/6 inch long. Adults are black with white folded wings; young ones are wingless, yellow or pinkish-red, with a light-colored band across the back.

"If you find numerous chinch bugs in the brown areas, there's a good chance they're causing the problem, not lack of moisture. Again, treat as soon as possible with an insecticide labeled for chinch bugs," he said. "Before you treat for chinch bugs, be sure you don't really have big-eyed bugs. They are beneficial and feed on chinch bugs and other insects, keeping them in control without chemicals. Don't treat if the insect you find in damaged areas is the big-eyed bug. You don't want to kill them. They look similar to the chinch bugs but have large protruding eyes, while the chinch bug has much smaller eyes compared to its head."

Diseases aren't usually a problem in hot, dry weather, but they sometimes appear when turfgrass is under stress from things like drought. Turfgrass diseases usually occur in a pattern, like circular spots. If disease is suspected, check the runners (stolons) for lesions. If several runners show lesions, there's a chance that disease may be the cause of your brown spots.

"Don't assume all brown spots in lawns are caused by lack of moisture. If an insect or disease is the cause, no amount of rain this fall will cure the damage," he said.

To determine if disease is the culprit, send a plant sample to the Texas A&M Plant Diagnostic Lab in College Station. Identify your problem before you treat for it. Contact your County Extension Office for information on how to submit a sample.