

A Guide to North Texas Lawns

presented by Lawn Doctor of Denton



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Introduction

We've created this booklet to provide you with information about the types of grasses, lawn fungus and insect pests that are most likely to be found on lawns across North Texas. We hope this will be helpful and educational so that you can establish and maintain a vibrant, healthy lawn you can be proud of!



Juan and Tammy Ramos
Lawn Doctor of Denton

Most Common Grass Types and Maintenance Tips



Three of the most successful and common types of grass in North Texas are Bermuda, St. Augustine and Zoysia. All are warm-season grasses, meaning they are found mainly in the southern regions of the United States where the summers are hot and winters are mild. At first frost, these grasses turn brown and go dormant for the winter.

All three varieties of grass are also drought-tolerant, meaning that they protect themselves (i.e., keeping their root alive) by going dormant during extended periods of drought in the summer.

Bermuda Grass



Bermuda is the most prevalent species of grass you'll find in North Texas. It provides a dense, green turf that produces deep roots in the soil. Bermuda grass grows and spreads quickly and is resistant to weeds. It offers excellent wear. You'll find it often used on golf courses and athletic fields.

Bermuda grass thrives in sunlight and requires 10-12 hours of direct sunlight each day. This type of grass does not tolerate shade well, so do not plant this if your yard has a lot of trees or shady areas.

Bermuda grass can easily be laid by seeding the lawn and you can watch your grass grow in. Seeding is much less expensive than laying sod on your lawn.

Bermuda grass browns during the winter months and is less tolerant of cold temperatures (10 degrees and lower) than other types of grass. Bermuda will also go dormant during extended periods of drought if it's not watered properly (1 – 1 ½ inches of water every week via irrigation system or rainfall).

To maintain Bermuda grass, grow at 1 to 1½ inches, depending on variety. During peak months, Bermuda grass may need to be mowed more than once a week.

St. Augustine Grass



St. Augustine grass is also very popular in North Texas. It's a dark-green thick grass with broad grass blades. Like Bermuda grass, St. Augustine grass grows aggressively and thickly, which keeps weeds at bay.

The outstanding feature of St. Augustine grass is that it's the most shade-tolerant of the warm-weather grasses, so if your yard has trees and shady spots, this is the best choice of grass. St. Augustine grass requires a minimum of 4 hours of direct sunlight; most strains perform best with 6 to 8 hours of sunlight a day.

St. Augustine grass cannot tolerate as much foot traffic as St. Augustine or Zoysia, so it is not a good choice if you are a pet owner. St. Augustine grass is established via sod or plugs; it cannot reliably be started from seed. Sodding is more expensive than seeding, but then again, sodding means you immediately have a lush lawn!

St. Augustine grass is more susceptible to diseases (mildew) and pests, such as chinch bugs, grub worms, armyworms and sod webworms. Also, this species of grass requires more watering than the other two types of grass mentioned in this booklet.

St. Augustine grass should be mowed at 2 ½ to 3 ½ inches high. It's important that this type of grass is not mowed too short, as it would impede supply of nutrients to the grass and make the grass weak.

Zoysia Grass



If you love the look of the lush lawns that you see in parks, golf courses and prestigious neighborhoods, Zoysia grass may be a good choice for your lawn. It's a dense turf that resists weeds and fungus. This species stands up to wear, making it a great option for yards that get a lot of use, i.e. kids playing in the yard, dogs running around, etc.

Texture-wise, Zoysia is finer, and it is a slower-growing grass than the Bermuda or St. Augustine grasses. Zoysia is the only one of these 3 types of grasses that requires dethatching in the spring.

Full sun is best for Zoysia, but it can tolerate light shade. Zoysia requires 4 hours of direct sunlight a day, or 8 hours of at least 50% sunlight.

Zoysia grass is slow to establish and spread. The best way to establish Zoysia grass is by sodding, which is more expensive than seeding and requires more attention.

As temperatures drop in the fall, Zoysia retains its light to medium green color longer than Bermuda grass and other grass varieties, and it's one of the first warm-season grasses to turn green when warmer temperatures arrive in the spring.

Mow Zoysia grass at half-inch to 2 inches. Zoysia is a stiffer grass, so it's more difficult to mow. Therefore, it's very important that the lawn mower blades be sharp. Dull blades will damage the grass. Don't cut the grass too short, or the grass will not be as thick or as healthy.

Frank Talk About Lawn Fungus

Brown Patch



If you're seeing brown patches or bright yellow blades on your lawn, it's possible that your lawn has a case of lawn fungus. Your lawn is a living entity and there are millions of fungi spores on your lawn. Most of them don't cause any trouble, but under some circumstances, such as a rainy season, drought, overwatering or substandard lawn care, fungi can spread out of control, leaving your lawn stressed and looking less than healthy. Brown patch occurs most commonly in the fall but can appear during the spring.

The good news is that you can treat many cases of lawn fungus - and prevent future cases - just by following good lawn care practices. In some cases, the solution may be the application of a fungicide.

Brown patch fungus will remain on your lawn until the temperatures are cold enough that the grass on your lawn goes dormant. It's important to act quickly if you notice the patches so that they don't spread or return in the spring.

There are a number of ways to treat brown patch:

- Apply a fungicide and apply as soon as you spot signs of fungus
- Don't mow your lawn too short. Remove no more than one-third of the grass height when mowing. Taller grass will reduce plant stress and allow it to recover.

- Rake fallen leaves to make sure the sun can reach your grass and dry out the damp root area
- Aerate your lawn to help promote drainage and discourage fungus at the soil level
- Keep your lawn mower blade sharp. This helps your lawn stay healthy.

Don't fertilize your soil without testing the pH and nitrogen levels. That way, you can choose the correct amount of fertilizer and only apply it as necessary.

Take-All Root Rot (TARR)



Take-all root rot (TARR) is a disease affecting the roots of grass and many cereal crops, such as wheat and barley. It's caused by a fungus (*Gaeumannomyces graminis*) that lives in the soil. St. Augustine grass is especially susceptible to this serious disease, but TARR can also affect Bermuda grass and even Zoysia grass.

The fungus lives in thatch (layers of stems, leaves and grass roots). Take-all root rot most often appears in the spring when the grass emerges from winter dormancy.

However, symptoms can appear during the growing season if the grass is stressed due to heat, drought, shade and other adverse conditions.

A lawn infected with TARR will come back slowly in the spring and the blades will be yellow or pale-green. The leaf blades will then turn brown, and the roots will also turn brown and begin to rot away.

Preventative lawn maintenance is the best way to keep Take-all root rot at bay. Aerate the soil, make sure the grass is mowed to the proper height, irrigate the lawn well (but do not overwater), ensure that the grass is getting enough sunlight, etc.

The application of peat moss is effective in reducing the symptoms and discouraging the spread of root rot. This is because TARR thrives in alkaline soil, and peat moss has a low pH and thus can suppress the spread of the disease.

Fungicides



Along with preventative lawn maintenance, fungicides can help keep your lawn healthy. Fungus lawn disease most often happens during rainy periods or when too much water from sprinkler systems is applied to the lawn.

Fungicides are pesticides that kill or prevent the growth of fungi and their spores. They cannot repair damaged turf areas. Fungicide kills existing fungus in the affected area and reduces spreading to other areas.

The type of fungicide to use depends on the type of lawn disease and grass type.

Lawn Aeration



Lawn aeration is essential for maintaining a lush, green lawn. What is lawn aeration? It's basically poking holes in your lawn to loosen compacted soil or thatch buildup. This makes it easier for your lawn to absorb sunlight, water and nutrients.

Aeration will not damage your lawn. Poking all those holes in your lawn actually helps make it healthier by making it easier for air, water and nutrients to reach deeper in the root system.

Before aerating your lawn, it's very important that you flag all sprinkler heads and anything that is less than 4" deep. This will help prevent damage to your irrigation system.

Peat Moss



Peat moss is decomposed organic material that is salvaged from peat bogs. Its main benefit is that it helps soil retain moisture longer. It is NOT a fertilizer.

In addition to absorbing and retaining water, peat moss helps prevent soil compaction due to its lightweight and loose texture. Peat moss holds soil nutrients. It is completely sterile, harbors no disease organisms and rarely contains weed seeds or pests. Sterility makes it an optimum choice for starting seeds. Seedlings are susceptible to fungal disease; fungi can't survive in peat.

On the downside, peat moss is an unsustainable, non-renewable source. It releases greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, which can contribute to climate change. Applying peat moss to your grass will increase the soil's acidity, which may hinder grass growth, encourage weeds and reduce the population of beneficial (to the soil) earthworms in your lawn.

Common Insect Pests in North Texas

North Texans take pride in their well-maintained lawns. An attractive lawn contributes to curb appeal and increases the value of the property. A healthy, green lawn provides an inviting place to relax and spend time with friends and family. There are environmental benefits of lawns, too, such as acting as a natural coolant and air purifier, preventing erosion and reducing noise pollution.

However, there are numerous challenges to keeping a lawn looking green and healthy, such as extreme temperatures, weeds and insect pests. Some of the most common insect pests that North Texans contend with are chinch bugs, grubs, armyworms and fire ants.

Chinch Bugs



Chinch bugs are small black insects that are a serious and common pest of St. Augustine grass, though they will also feed on Bermuda grass and Zoysia grass.

While chinch bugs are capable of doing serious damage to grass, they're harmless to humans, so don't worry about being bitten by one.

Why are chinch bugs so damaging to lawns? They insert their beak-like mouthparts in the grass and suck on the leaf juices, which dries the grass blade out. Chinch bugs also release a toxin while feeding that causes the grass to wilt, turn yellow and die.

Chinch bugs appear during the hot, dry summer months and on the sunniest spots on the lawn. The damage usually shows up in August. There is a general yellowing of the turf and thin, bare spots appear on the lawn. There will be irregular patchy areas of damage.

The best way to prevent chinch bugs from appearing on your lawn is to practice good lawn maintenance: mowing the lawn at the recommended height, proper lawn irrigation, dethatching the lawn and aerating the lawn regularly.

Should there be evidence of chinch bug damage, application of insecticide is needed. If the infestation is mild, it should take a week or two to eliminate chinch bugs. A moderate infestation will take two to three weeks, and in the case in extreme infestation, it may take even longer to eliminate all of them.

Grub Worms



Lawn grubs (grub worms) are the worm-like larvae of different types of beetles, such as Japanese Beetles and June Bugs, that hatch in the spring and summer. These pests are roughly an inch long and have soft white bodies with a set of legs near their heads. They curl up into a C-shape when disturbed.

Grubs are dormant in winter and become active when the weather starts to warm up. During the spring and summer months, they hatch and then burrow into your lawn and feed on your grass roots, causing extensive damage.

As grubs grow into adult beetles, they start to mate and lay eggs. They lay their eggs near their feeding sites in July and August, creating new grubs that burrow in the soil and eat the grass roots, continuing the infestation. Adult beetles have a life cycle of 1-3 years.

Grub damage can resemble other types of damage on your lawn, such as drought. But here are some signs to look for:

- Yellowing grass – grass turns spongy and yellow
- Presence of other pests species in your yard. Skunks, raccoons and other digging pests love to eat grubs!
- Moths and beetles flying around at grass level
- Appearance of drought despite regular watering
- To determine the presence of white grubs – use a shovel to dig up a section of your lawn

Armyworms



Armyworms are destructive lawn pests that feed primarily on Bermuda grass, but also feed on Fescue, Rye and Bluegrass (good news, Zoysia grass lawns: armyworms don't like you). There are several different types of armyworms, but it's the fall armyworm, that are brown with yellow stripes, that is most common in North Texas.

Armyworms are caterpillars that are around 1 ½ inches long. They are most active at night and hide underneath grass and lawn debris during the day.

Armyworms get their name due to traveling in packs, marching along like an army and devouring everything in their path. An area as large as a football field can be consumed in two to three days!

How do you know if you have a potential problem with armyworms?

- You spot clusters of eggs, caterpillar frass (moist green or yellow fecal pellets at the base of grass or plant leaves) or live armyworm moths or larvae. The larvae are most active in early morning or evening.
- You see a greater presence of birds on your lawn. They eat the caterpillars, but won't get enough of them to save your lawn.
- Tell-tale brown patches on your lawn!

An armyworm infestation is most likely to occur in late summer or early fall when rainfall is above average.

How can you treat armyworms? Mow the grass short and water it well. Spray the grass with a liquid insecticide, then leave your lawn alone for at least three days, with no mowing or watering. This will give the insecticide time to work. Or you may need the help of a professional lawn service, like Lawn Doctor.

Fire Ants



Fire ants are a common pest in North Texas (they love the warmer climate) and also are one of the most invasive species in the world. If you've ever been bitten and stung by fire ants, you know what a nuisance they are! Their stings hurt and can cause itchy marks on your body. Fortunately, in most cases, the stings, while painful, are not dangerous unless you have an allergic reaction to fire ants. They can be a danger to your pets.

Fire ants are aggressive and territorial. You'll see them swarming out of mounds of dirt when their nest is disturbed.

Some fire ant colonies have multiple queens. This means that worker ants freely move from one mound to another, which drastically increases the number of mounds in the yard.

In addition to posing a health threat to humans and pets, fire ants can cause turf damage with their dirt mounds.

So what's the best way to get rid of fire ants? The bad news is that it's nearly impossible to completely wipe them out due to the sheer number of underground colonies. There are various remedies listed, such as pouring boiling water over the mounds or using a broadcast fire ant bait, but the most effective way to get rid of fire ants is to hire a professional lawn service or pest control service to do the job. Once the lawn is treated, it's a good idea to inspect periodically to ensure fire ants don't take over again. The best time to treat your lawn for fire ants is in the spring and fall.

Mosquitoes



And then there's the bane of every summer gathering or outdoor event, the mosquito. Did you know that 85 species of mosquitoes call North Texas home? While some species are harmless, others carry dangerous diseases, including malaria, West Nile and Zika viruses.

There are numerous places around your yard where mosquitoes breed – the bird bath, your pet's water dish, swimming pools, buckets and pails, garbage can lids, clogged gutters, standing water from rains, etc.

Lawn Doctor's Yard Armour Mosquito Control service provides protection for you, your family, your home, your pets and visitors against these dangerous insects.

Our Mosquito Control services can help with the following:

- Mosquito Prevention: Our expert technicians provide a full mosquito risk assessment of your property and then show you how to make it less friendly to mosquitoes
- Mosquito Control: We effectively treat existing mosquito problems through targeted Yard Armour applications to significantly reduce mosquitoes and provide a protective barrier against them
- Mosquito Maintenance: We provide routine inspections and preventative treatments to prevent mosquitoes from being a nuisance so you can continue to enjoy your yard!

Lawn Doctor of Denton also offers one-time special event mosquito control sprays. If you're planning a wedding, reunion, Sweet Sixteen party or graduation in your yard, this service will stop pesky mosquitoes from making an appearance.

Lawn Doctor's Yard Armour Pest Control Program



Lawn Doctor's Yard Armour Outdoor Pest Control services can help keep pests such as chinch bugs, grub worms, armyworms and fire ants out of your yard so that you can enjoy a beautiful, healthy lawn. A Lawn Doctor professional will evaluate your lawn for potentially harmful pests and then prescribe the best treatment for your lawn. We also offer an ongoing treatment program to keep your yard safe and free from pests year-round.

We Help Make Lawns Beautiful

Lawn Doctor of Denton knows North Texas lawns. We're a veteran-owned local business focused on giving our customers attentive care, quality service and the best-looking lawn on the block! We have the expertise and equipment to help make your lawn healthy, green and free of lawn diseases, fungus and insect pests that might pose a threat to your lawn.

Our mission is to treat your lawn with the utmost care and leave it looking better than we found it. Give us a call today at (940) 268-3666 to schedule an appointment. We look forward to serving you!

