

BEAUTY AND ORDER

MAY 2014

Winter kill

While winter did figuratively seem to about kill many of us this year, when it comes to turf, it really did! Winter kill in lawns is a catch-all term used to describe the loss of grass over the winter for a variety of reasons. This can include death from direct exposure to low temperatures, desiccation from frozen soil, ice damage, compaction and even winter fungal diseases.



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We received many calls from clients this spring with sizeable dead areas in lawns that were flawless last fall. After visiting the sites and scratching my head upon finding no insect or biotic culprit, a pattern began to emerge.

In every instance, grass loss was occurring in either shaded areas (whether from a structure or tree), spots with poor drainage, locations with extended snow cover, or areas seeded in October. This pattern was consistent with the required stresses for winter kill and became our suspicion and diagnosis.

Coincidentally, shortly after reaching this conclusion our friend, Megan Kennelly, the extension plant pathologist at Kansas State University, emailed an alert. The alert highlighted the frequency of calls/samples to her lab with the exact same symptoms we had observed, which she diagnosed as winter kill, and referenced a Purdue University article (see link at the right)



Winter kill symptoms can be seen in this area of grass.

explaining the symptoms and cause. I must say it is always nice when my diagnostic conclusions match those of smart people. This can easily go to one's head, but don't worry, I still remember my ACT score for college admission — no swagger here. Well okay, maybe a little.

Finally, one surprise in the Purdue article is that fescue is listed as medium in terms of low temperature tolerance. What? Our beloved fescue, just medium? Guess nobody is perfect, not even grass.

In any case, the good news is the striking appearance of most winter killed areas when lawns were breaking

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The following is a link to an article from Purdue University:
purdueturftips.blogspot.com/2014/03/cool-season-turf-winterkill-potential.html

dormancy is generally diminishing as adjacent surrounding grass begins to grow and cover the areas. Some lawns may need some fall seeding for full recovery, but the summer will be the tell-tale. For now, I'm enjoying spring and bet you are, too!

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