



Multiple articles for Southwest Florida (SWFL) turf fungus detail the common diseases, contributing environmental factors, and recommended management strategies. The subtropical climate creates an ideal environment for fungi that can damage lawns, particularly during warm, humid, and rainy seasons.

#### Common turf fungi in SWFL

- **Brown Patch (Large Patch):** Caused by *Rhizoctonia solani*, this is one of the most common and damaging diseases for Florida lawns, especially St. Augustine and Zoysia grasses. Symptoms appear as circular, light brown, thinned patches that can range from inches to several feet in diameter. It is most active in cool, moist conditions from fall through spring, though it can survive through the summer.
- **Dollar Spot:** This fungus appears as small, silver-dollar-sized, sunken patches of bleached grass. It often affects grasses that are under-fertilized or mowed too short, such as Bermuda, Centipede, and Zoysia.
- **Gray Leaf Spot:** A persistent fungus that primarily attacks St. Augustine grass, causing grayish-brown spots with dark borders on the grass blades. It can spread quickly during hot, humid weather.
- **Pythium Blight:** This fungus can cause dark, greasy patches and often results from excessive moisture or poor drainage.
- **Fairy Ring:** This is caused by soil-dwelling fungi and appears as rings or arcs of lush, dark green grass that can sometimes be accompanied by mushrooms.

#### Causes and contributing factors

Fungi flourish in the warm, damp conditions typical of Southwest Florida, but their spread is heavily influenced by cultural practices.

- **Water management:** The most crucial factor in fungal growth is moisture.
  - **Overwatering** creates an ideal breeding ground for fungi.
  - **Poor drainage** and **excessive rainfall** can saturate lawns, fostering disease.

- **Timing of irrigation** matters; watering early in the morning allows the grass to dry during the day. Watering in the evening keeps the lawn damp overnight.
- **Nutrient levels:** A nutritional imbalance can make grass more susceptible to disease.
  - Too much or too little nitrogen can encourage fungus.
  - It is recommended to apply slow-release fertilizers and maintain a balanced ratio of nitrogen to potassium.
- **Excessive thatch:** A thick layer of decomposing plant material, or thatch, holds moisture and creates a favorable habitat for fungi.
- **Compacted soil:** Soil that is too dense has poor drainage, trapping moisture and stressing the grass.
- **Mowing practices:** Mowing with dull blades or cutting the grass too short can injure the turf, creating entry points for fungi.

Management and prevention strategies

Articles from the University of Florida's IFAS Extension and local landscaping experts recommend several methods for controlling turf fungus.

- **Prioritize cultural controls:** The first line of defense should be improving lawn care practices.
  - **Proper irrigation** is key. Water deeply but infrequently, only when the grass shows signs of thirst. Calibrating your irrigation system is recommended.
  - **Improve air circulation** by mowing regularly at the appropriate height for your grass type.
  - **Remove excessive thatch** and maintain proper fertilization.
- **Use fungicides when necessary:**
  - Fungicides should be applied only when cultural controls are insufficient.
  - They work by suppressing or preventing fungal growth, but they do not repair existing damage. New, healthy growth is needed for full recovery.
  - Correctly identifying the fungus is important for choosing an effective fungicide.