

Spring Weather Hard on Gardens, Yards

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The abundance of rain this spring is setting us up for fungal diseases throughout the yard and garden. Keeping an eye open for any leaf spots or mold patches on garden plants is important. Early detection and prompt action can prevent most diseases from becoming too serious. At the first sign of disease problems, the product chlorothalonil (Daconil) can be applied to prevent the spread of many of the most common diseases.

There are numerous fungal diseases that can infect lawns and cause dead patches of grass. They are quite difficult to identify without sending samples to the Purdue diagnostic lab. Purdue turfgrass specialists tell me that fungal diseases of home lawns rarely benefit from fungicide treatments. By the time most homeowners recognize that they have a lawn disease problem, we are already past the point of infection, and fungicide treatments won't work.

Crabgrass and annual weeds are becoming a big problem. Pre-emergent herbicides are usually applied in March in the Evansville area, and normally provide up to 90 days control against weed seed germination. Most of our early spring treatments were washed out of the soil long ago, and that means crabgrass and other annual weeds are popping up all over the place. I'd suggest another round of pre-emergent herbicides to catch late-germinating seeds, especially in ornamental beds; you will still need to hand-pull or use post-emergent herbicides on existing weeds.

Yellow nutsedge is going to be a big lawn problem this year. This fast-growing, yellowish-green, grass-like weed loves wet soils. It was very troublesome last year, so I expect it will be a nightmare this year. Since it is not a grass or a broadleaf plant, standard weed-control products won't touch it. Homeowners who've had nutsedge in previous years should treat their lawns with either sulfentrazone (Ortho Nutsedge Killer for Lawns) or halosulfuron (Sedgehammer and others) now, and again in 6 to 10 weeks.

One of the most common garden problems I see in wet years is leaf roll on tomatoes. Leaf roll starts with an upward cupping at the leaf margins, followed by inward rolling of the leaves. It will be seen first on lower leaves and then progress upwards as soggy conditions continue. The leaves are not limp and wilted, but are instead tough and leathery. If the soil dries out, new growth will be normal, although the rolled leaves generally don't unroll. Yield should be about normal, although the rolled leaves don't provide much shade to the fruit, so sunscald might be a problem.

Much of our early spring garden fertilizer has washed out of the soil by now. I'd plan on side-dressing throughout the garden, to keep plant vigor up. Be on the lookout for slugs, which love moisture and will hide under the mulch.

Be sure to read and follow all label directions before buying and using any pesticide product. For more information on dealing with this wet spring, please contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287.