

# Spring Dead Spot of Bermuda Grass Lawns

Dr. Green Thumb  
Arkansas Gardener – March  
By: Stephen Vann

## Background

Spring dead spot disease can show up each year on Bermuda grass home lawns. This disease becomes evident around green-up time in the spring during March or April in Arkansas. In this area of the United States, spring dead spot (SDS) is caused by the fungus *Leptosphaeria korrae*. This disease is considered by many researchers as the most significant disease of Bermuda grass. Several other fungi can cause this disease in other regions of the United States.

## Symptoms

This disease primarily affects the root tissues, which causes plant death. The roots and stolons of diseased plants are dark brown to black and are severely rotted (**FIG.1**). This disease is more prevalent on intensively managed Bermuda grass and appears as well-defined, sunken, or depressed patches that can range in size from a few inches to more than three feet in diameter (**FIG. 2**). Leaves become bleached, gray, and straw-colored. The dead, sunken patches can often get larger year after year. Typically, symptoms do not appear on newly established grass (less than three years). Patches are slow to fill in. Diseased areas may not fill in until late summer. Weeds that colonize the weak areas will often slow recovery of the turf grass. SDS infection usually occurs in early fall during cool, moist weather, but it doesn't become evident until the following spring. Grass varieties that are subject to winter damage tend to be more susceptible to this disease.



FIG. 1 Black roots and stolons of infected Bermuda grass



FIG. 2 Sunken patches of spring dead spot in the lawn

## Prescription

Proper plant nutrition can play a pivotal role in disease management. Homeowners should be sure that there is an adequate potassium level in the soil. A regular soil test should be done to monitor potash levels. Soils with a pH level less than 6.0 are recommended because the fungus prefers alkaline soils. Ammonium sulfate can be used to lower soil pH. When establishing the lawn, homeowners should select winter-hardy varieties to grow. Removal of affected patches followed by resodding can be useful

if there are only a few diseased areas in the lawn. There are several commercial fungicides that are registered for spring dead spot. For maximum effectiveness, these materials will need to be applied in the fall by a professional.

\*\*[See Extension Fact Sheet FSA7551](#)

BYLINE: Stephen Vann is an associate professor and Extension plant pathologist with the University of Arkansas, Cooperative Extension Service.

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating.

The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital or veteran status, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.