



Pythium Blight and Root Rot on Turfgrass

Pythium sp.

Introduction: All commonly cultivated cool-season turfgrasses are susceptible to attack by *Pythium* spp. When foliage is attacked a disease called cottony blight, grease spot, or Pythium blight results. This disease is most common during hot, very humid weather. The disease can spread rapidly, killing large areas of seedling or established turf in as little as a day during conditions of high temperatures 27°C to 32°C (80°F to 90°F), high soil moisture, and little air movement over the turf. The disease can also occur at lower temperatures during cool 13°C to 18°C (55°F to 65°F) wet weather. When root and crown tissue is attacked, Pythium root and crown rot results. This disease can occur during warm, hot, or cool weather. Wet, humid conditions favor the disease.

Symptoms: Pythium blight appears as small, usually irregularly-shaped spots 2 to 10 cm in diameter. The grass blades have a water-soaked appearance, and the diseased areas feel and look greasy or slimy. Upon drying, these killed areas of turf turn light brown or a straw-colored hue and may have a slight reddish tinge. Groups of affected patches may coalesce into larger, irregularly-shaped areas or into elongate streaks which often extend in the direction of drainage flow or of mowing. Dead and dying grass blades may become matted together if conditions remain moist, especially in areas that are subjected to traffic.

If a sudden drop in temperature, or humidity causes disease progress to stop before the whole leaf blades are killed, straw-colored spots of varying sizes may develop on the leaf blades. These spots may resemble those of "dollar spot", except that the dark brown lesion so often associated with the latter disease is not found with Pythium blight. The blades may twist and collapse at the lesion.

Microscopic examination may allow for detection of oospores within the plant tissue. These circular spores can vary in diameter from 12 to 38 µm but only those with oospores above 20 µm in diameter are considered to be serious pathogens of turfgrass.

Disease Cycle: This pathogen survives over winter and during periods adverse to disease development as resistant oospores in the soil. It can be moved from one area to another by soil movement, by transporting diseased plants or plant parts, and by equipment, shoes, or surface water.

"Damping off", "seed decay", or "seedling blight" of turf grasses can also be caused by Pythium fungi. These fungi may also attack the plant roots and crowns, causing reduced growth, an off-color, and thinning of turf (Pythium root and crown rot).

Diseased plants serve as infection centers from which the fungus spreads. Spread from these areas can be rapid in wet or humid, hot weather. High nitrogen fertility favors the disease on many grass varieties. Alkaline soil and calcium deficient soil also tend to favor the disease.

Management Strategies: Maintain grass growth with low to moderate rates of balanced fertilizers, and maintain soil pH in the neutral to slightly acid range. Avoid mowing when the grass is wet. Do not water in the late afternoon or early evening. If the disease occurs, fungicide use will probably be necessary to prevent spread under favorable conditions.

If Pythium blight occurs on home lawns in New York State, homeowners may apply Heritage or some products containing one of the following active ingredients: fosetyl-Al, metalaxyl-M, or chloroneb. Where Pythium root

and crown rot is severe, Heritage (azoxystrobin) or fosetyl-Al may be used. Be certain any formulation(s) of pesticide(s) you purchase are registered for the intended use.

Additional products may be available for commercial use. Commercial applicators should refer to the appropriate commercial pest management guidelines, or contact their local Cooperative Extension Office for more information on currently registered products.

If grass must be seeded in warm weather in an area known to have had the disease, fungicides may be needed until the grass grows out of the seedling stage, or until the weather becomes cooler or drier. If possible, postpone seeding until weather is less favorable for disease development.

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The Pesticide Management Education Program (PMEP), in cooperation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), maintains a web site with a searchable database for pesticide products currently registered in New York State. Homeowners who have Internet access can locate currently registered products at <http://pims.psur.cornell.edu/>. Several different queries are available that will produce a summary for the product(s) that the system locates. If the system fails to locate the product in question, then that product is not currently registered in New York State. The database also provides a summary of important information related to every product currently registered. Two data fields "Status" and "Expiration Date" are provided in each summary. Products with a status of "Registered - Discontinued" are currently registered but will probably be discontinued for use, sale, and distribution in New York State after the date noted in the "Expiration Date" field.

This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly, some materials mentioned may no longer be available, and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold, and/or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension Specialist or your regional DEC office. **READ THE LABEL BEFORE APPLYING ANY PESTICIDE.**

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