

## Treating a Yellow Lawn

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Statistics for plantanswers.com indicate that seeking information about a “yellow lawn” is the most frequent inquiry made over the last few weeks. It is not a simple issue because there are at least two causes for lawn yellowing at this time.

If your lawn was blessed by a cover of rescue grass and/ or annual bluegrass this winter, the yellowing could be the result of those 2 cool weather “weeds” declining as temperatures increase. They looked great as a winter lawn when mowed every two weeks through the winter, but now they are trying to survive long enough in the warm weather to set seed. As they decline they lose their lush green color and turn yellow. The only way to deal with it is to keep mowing and be patient. Applying a herbicide now will not speed up the decline or disappearance of the weed grasses. If you do not want the grasses to return next winter, however, put a note on your calendar for next September 1 to apply Amaze, Dimension or one of the other preemergent herbicides that will prevent the seed from germinating.

The second common cause of a yellow lawn at this time of the year is iron chlorosis. The St Augustine grass has trouble obtaining enough iron to keep up with its growth rate when the soil is still cool. The soils are warming up and the grass roots are expanding so on most lawns the problem will eventually correct itself. It will help to conduct the recommended fertilization with the most common lawn fertilizer –slow release 19-5-9 because it includes iron. You can speed up the process by using a lawn fertilizer such as Iron-Plus which includes more iron and fast-release nitrogen.

What also would work is to apply a light dose of 19-5-9 followed by a light dose of Iron Plus to supply the desirable iron and some slow-release nitrogen. If there is plenty of St Augustine foliage applying iron chelate through a hose end sprayer also works. In tests I conducted a number of years ago, application of the product Ironite did not address the issue during the current growing season.

Another issue with the lawn that gets more prevalent every year is the problem of shade. Bermuda grass and buffalo grass have no tolerance for shade. Even though we describe St Augustine and zoysia grass as shade tolerant, they require at least 6 hours of sun to prosper.

The problem gets worst every year because the shade trees in many neighborhoods have grown up and are providing more shade as a 35 feet tall tree than they did as a 10 ft. tall transplant. Mature trees are also thicker because of the generous rains that we have received over the last 3 years and the fact that many homes and businesses water the landscape.

I would argue that the shade is more important than a thick lawn but some trees can be pruned to allow more light to reach the grass. For new or replacement lawns, St Augustine grass has more shade tolerance than the other grasses. Some St Augustine varieties may have slightly more shade tolerance than others( heavy emphasis on the slightly!), but the more reasonable solutions are to tolerate a thin lawn and celebrate the shade, or convert the lawn to shade tolerant groundcovers such as Asiatic jasmine, monkey grass, liriope, dwarf ruellia, blue plumbago, and blueshade. Using hardscape such as flagstone, decomposed granite, and mulch decorated with shade-tolerant perennials also works. Review the many alternatives to lawns in the SAWS Landscape website and or plantanswers.com.

Gardeners with questions about attracting butterflies to their landscapes can join me at Milbergers Nursery ( Bulverde and 1604) for the dedication of their new Certified Butterfly Garden. I will be available to answer questions about butterfly gardening from 11am through 3 pm on Saturday May 13.