



Lawn Pest and Disease Management

General Principles for lawn pest and disease management on the Gold Coast:

Managing lawn pests and diseases on the Gold Coast, is a critical part of maintaining a healthy and vibrant turf. The region's warm, humid, and often wet subtropical climate provides ideal conditions for many common lawn issues. An integrated approach, focusing on prevention and early detection, is the most effective strategy.

I. General Lawn Health and Prevention (The Foundation):

A healthy lawn is much more resistant to pests and diseases.

1. Right Turf for the Right Place:

- Choose a grass variety that is well-suited to the Gold Coast climate and your specific conditions (sunlight, traffic, desired maintenance level). Common varieties include Buffalo (e.g., Sir Walter, Palmetto), Couch (e.g., Sir Grange, TifTuf), Zoysia (e.g., Empire, Nara Native). Some varieties have better natural resistance to certain pests or diseases.
- For shaded areas, select shade-tolerant varieties.

2. Proper Mowing:

- **Height:** Mow at the recommended height for your turf type. Mowing too short (scalping) stresses the grass, making it more vulnerable. Taller grass can shade out some weeds and encourage deeper roots.
- **Frequency:** Mow regularly to remove only a third of the blade at a time. In the warmer, growing months (Spring-Autumn), this might be weekly. In cooler months, less frequently.
- **Sharp Blades:** Dull mower blades tear grass, creating jagged cuts that are entry points for diseases. Sharpen blades regularly.
- **Mulch Mowing:** Leave clippings on the lawn (unless heavily diseased) to return nutrients and organic matter to the soil.

3. Correct Watering:

- **Deep and Infrequent:** Water deeply (to encourage deep root growth) but less frequently. This makes the lawn more drought-tolerant and less susceptible to surface-dwelling pests and fungal diseases.
- **Timing:** Water in the early morning (before 9 AM). This allows the grass blades to dry completely before nightfall, significantly reducing the risk of fungal diseases that thrive in prolonged moisture. Avoid evening watering on the Gold Coast.
- **Monitor Rainfall:** Adjust your watering schedule based on rainfall. Overwatering is a common cause of disease.

4. Optimal Fertilisation:

- **Balanced Nutrients:** Use a high-quality, slow-release fertiliser specifically designed for your grass type and the Gold Coast climate.
- **Avoid Over-fertilising:** Too much nitrogen can lead to rapid, lush growth that is more susceptible to disease and insect attack.
- **Timing:** Fertilise in Spring, early Summer, and Autumn. Avoid heavy fertilising in the peak of summer or winter dormancy.

5. Soil Health and Aeration:

- **Compaction:** Gold Coast soils, especially clay-rich ones, can become compacted, restricting air, water, and nutrient movement to roots. Compacted soil also exacerbates drainage issues leading to fungal problems.
- **Aeration:** Regularly aerate your lawn (annually or bi-annually, especially in high-traffic areas) to alleviate compaction. Use a garden fork for small areas or a mechanical aerator for larger lawns.
- **Wetting Agents:** If you have hydrophobic (water-repellent) spots or dry patches, apply a soil wetting agent to help water penetrate evenly.
- **Top Dressing:** Applying a thin layer of sandy loam or good quality top-dressing mix can improve soil structure and level out uneven areas.

6. Thatch Management:

- **What is Thatch?** A layer of organic matter (dead grass blades, stems) that accumulates between the green grass and the soil surface.
- **Problem:** Excessive thatch (over 1.5-2 cm) can prevent water and nutrients from reaching the soil, harbour pests, and promote fungal diseases.
- **Control:** Regular dethatching (verti-mowing or scarifying) in Spring or early Summer can help, especially for Buffalo and Couch lawns.

II. Common Lawn Pests on the Gold Coast:

● Lawn Grubs (Armyworm, Sod Webworm, Cutworm, African Black Beetle larvae/Curl Grubs):

- **Signs:** Irregular brown patches that spread, grass easily pulled up (like a rug) if it's scarab grubs eating roots, visible caterpillars (armyworm/sod webworm) on grass blades, birds feeding on your lawn. Armyworm and sod webworm are active at night.
- **Test:** Mix a bucket of soapy water and pour it over an affected area (e.g., 1 sq m). Within 10-15 minutes, grubs should come to the surface.
- **Control:**
 - **Biological:** Encourage natural predators (birds, parasitic wasps), apply beneficial nematodes.
 - **Chemical:** Use targeted insecticides containing active ingredients like Bifenthrin, Chlorantraniliprole, or Imidacloprid (check label for grub type). Apply in late afternoon/early evening when grubs are most active, and water in thoroughly as per label instructions. Preventative treatments (e.g., products lasting 6 months) are available.

● Mole Crickets:

- **Signs:** Tunnels and raised ridges in the lawn, particularly after rain. Irregular brown patches where roots are damaged.
- **Control:** Insecticides are available. Soapy water test can also bring them to the surface.

● Couch Mites (on Couch Grass):

- **Signs:** Stunted, distorted, or purplish growth, often in circular patches, creating a "witches' broom" appearance. Hard to see with the naked eye.
- **Control:** Specific miticides may be needed. Consult a lawn care professional.
- **Ants:**
 - **Signs:** Ant mounds, disturbed soil, can affect lawn appearance.
 - **Control:** Use targeted ant baits or liquid ant killers. Maintain a healthy lawn, as ants often prefer drier, less healthy areas.

III. Common Lawn Diseases on the Gold Coast (mostly fungal):

These thrive in warm, humid conditions, often exacerbated by overwatering or poor drainage.

- **Brown Patch (*Rhizoctonia solani*):**
 - **Signs:** Circular or irregular brown/yellow patches, often with a darker outer ring or "smoke ring."
 - **Conditions:** Hot, humid weather, high nitrogen, overwatering, poor drainage.
 - **Control:** Improve air circulation, reduce evening watering, aerate, apply specific fungicides (e.g., containing Azoxystrobin or Propiconazole).
- **Dollar Spot (*Sclerotinia homoeocarpa*):**
 - **Signs:** Small, silver-dollar-sized bleached spots that can merge into larger patches.
 - **Conditions:** Low nitrogen, morning dew, drought stress.
 - **Control:** Regular, balanced fertilisation, proper watering, improve air circulation. Fungicides may be needed for severe cases.
- **Grey Leaf Spot (*Pyricularia grisea*):**
 - **Signs:** Grey or tan leaf spots with darker borders, often causing thinning patches. Common on Sir Walter Buffalo.
 - **Conditions:** High humidity, prolonged leaf wetness, high nitrogen.
 - **Control:** Reduce evening watering, improve air circulation, proper mowing height, specific fungicides.
- **Rust (*Puccinia* spp.):**
 - **Signs:** Yellow-orange powdery spores on grass blades that rub off easily.
 - **Conditions:** High humidity, low nitrogen.
 - **Control:** Balanced fertilisation, regular mowing to remove infected blades, improve air circulation, fungicides if severe.
- **Fairy Ring:**
 - **Signs:** Rings or arcs of dark green grass, sometimes with mushrooms or dead grass inside. Caused by decomposing organic matter underground.
 - **Control:** Difficult to eliminate. Aerate, apply wetting agents, water deeply to break down organic matter. Removing the underlying organic matter is the only true solution but can be disruptive.
- **Pythium Blight:**
 - **Signs:** Greasy, water-soaked patches that turn brown and matted. Spreads quickly.
 - **Conditions:** Hot, very humid weather, poor drainage, overwatering.
 - **Control:** Excellent drainage is crucial. Specific fungicides for Pythium are needed urgently if detected.

IV. Management Strategies (Beyond the Basics):

- **Identification:** If you're unsure what pest or disease you have, take a sample (in a sealed bag) to your local nursery or a lawn care professional for diagnosis.
- **Professional Help:** For significant infestations or persistent problems, consider calling a professional lawn care service on the Gold Coast (e.g., Turftek, Lovelawns, Coochie HydroGreen). They have expertise, specialised equipment, and access to commercial-grade products.
- **Organic Options:** For those preferring a chemical-free approach:
 - **Nematodes:** For grub control (specify species).
 - **Diatomaceous Earth (DE):** Can deter some surface-crawling insects (apply dry).
 - **Neem Oil:** Can have some fungicidal and insecticidal properties.
 - **Homemade Solutions:** Soapy water sprays (for mild infestations).
 - **Focus on cultural practices (watering, mowing, soil health) as your primary defence.**
- **Product Selection:** If using chemicals, buy products specifically for lawns, and ensure they are compatible with your grass type. Always check the active ingredients and follow directions. Look for "Gold Coast" or "Queensland" specific advice on labels.
- **Record Keeping:** Note when you see issues, what you applied, and the results. This helps identify patterns and refine your management plan.

By consistently applying these preventative measures and acting swiftly and appropriately when issues arise, you can keep your Gold Coast lawn healthy, green, and beautiful year-round.