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Autumn is the time to monitor for Leaf Spot in sports stadia

Leaf Spot is likely to appear during autumn and early winter in sports stadia because of the unique micro climate that's created, even though it's not common in non-stadia environments at this time of year.

This is mostly due to changes in practices, such as the use of grow lights, under soil heating and because the stadia is enclosed, meaning the temperature can be higher. Nitrogen applications, although reduced, are still at a level that's ideal for the disease to thrive, and this coupled with increased moisture during the autumn and winter months mean that turf is more susceptible to Leaf Spot.

According to Colin Mumford, technical manager at Bayer, Leaf Spot is also associated with sports stadia around this time of year because the surrounding high stands and the roof block out sunlight which can hinder air circulation, and encourage dampness on the grass. In non-stadium environments trees and hedges can have the same effect, but generally the disease is more prevalent in warm/humid months.

"I know of stadium turf managers who have sprayed for Leaf Spot in December, for example, and this wouldn't happen outside of a stadia environment, at this time of year," he says.

Colin advises that it's important to monitor carefully for early signs, because if diseased turf is treated right away, the spread of the fungus can be halted.

"The fungi that cause Leaf Spot (*Bipolaris*, *Drechslera*, and *Curvularia*) usually first invade the leaves, producing small brown spots. The most common we get in the UK is the *Drechslera*, and the most susceptible to this is Perennial Ryegrass, (*Lolium perenne*). On Perennial Ryegrass, brown spots enlarge to lesions with grey centres and a brown margin. The spots enlarge until the entire width of the leaf blade is blighted," he says.

Colin warns that the leaf-spotting or leaf-blighting stage is less damaging to the turfgrass than the subsequent melting-out phase, where the crown and root can rot, causing severe thinning of the turf.

"As with all diseases, keeping plant nutrition at an optimum level is most important," says Colin. "It's crucial to maintain balanced turf nutrition. Applying excessive nitrogen will usually make Leaf Spot more severe. And because of the pressure to keep the turf looking healthy and playing well throughout the autumn and winter



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months, nitrogen applications in stadia environments can still be high enough to attract the disease. It's also important to note that the disease can be severe under nitrogen deficiencies. This is why balance, and good turf health really is key," says Colin.

"It's also crucial to keep the surface dry where possible. Again it's a difficult balancing act, because turf managers should ensure that there's adequate moisture for good turf growth, but also not too much water," he says. Colin recommends that seeding with a perennial rye grass mix that's less susceptible to Leaf Spot is important. "Additionally, when it comes to mowing, make sure your blades are sharp and clean, because jagged wounds on leaf blades can make the grass more susceptible to the disease. Perennial Ryegrass is wear tolerant, but it's also a tough grass so it's harder to cut meaning the blades dull quicker.

"Ultimately, if you keep the grass plants healthy, moisture levels low, and monitor the surface, you're doing the best you can, and when it does strike, take appropriate action as soon as possible.

"When you notice the first stages of Leaf Spot, treat immediately with a fungicide, to halt the spread of disease. To treat this, Interface® with Stressgard™ Formulation Technology is ideal, it has been proven to have full control over the disease and it's one of the only products with this high efficacy at this time of year. Due to the lower growth potential of turf, it's best to use a contact local penetrant mode of action such as Interface®," says Colin. Ryan Golding, head groundsman for Leeds Rhinos & Yorkshire Carnegie (Formerly Leeds rugby), has used Interface® to treat Leaf Spot.

"It's a brilliant product, and has shown fantastic results when treating Leaf Spot. The disease was eradicated thoroughly and quickly – and this is important, because one day the pitch can look fine and the next it can be yellow, and thinned out, because it's riddled with Leaf Spot.

"Colour is very important, because the fans want to see a vibrant green pitch when they watch their team, and also as many matches are televised, the pitch has to look healthy," says Ryan.

