

BOBBY LAWN NEWSLETTER



THATCH

April/May 2003

Ring, ring

“Hello, **Bobby Lawn Care.**”

“Yes hello, I want my lawn dethatched.”

“Does your lawn need dethatching?”

“Err... I don't know.”

“How about we come around and check to see if it does.”

“That would be great.”

Few lawns in our area need dethatching if they have been taken care of with a minimum of attention. Let's find out if **your** lawn needs dethatching.

First off “What is thatch?”

No, no... let's take a different route. Let's see where thatch occurs, and then it should be easier to visualize what thatch is. Thatch develops between the soil surface and the green shoots of the grass plant. I'll bet you didn't even know there was such a place. In many lawns this zone does not exist, since the grass plant is in direct contact with the soil, but when thatch does occur we now have a place that does exist.

Now, “What is thatch?”

Thatch is a layer of tightly intermingled dead and living organic matter.

“That's all?”

In general, that is all, but let's look a little deeper. This organic matter is made up mainly of “sclerified vascular strands of stems and leaf sheaths plus the nodes of stems, roots and such like material, with a high lignin content”. (Got that from a book). In layman's terms, that's mainly roots and stems containing a waxy substances (lignin). This waxy substance slows the decay process that naturally occurs in the life process of grass. When these roots, stems and other materials accumulate faster than they can be broken down, you get a buildup of thatch. If this is left unchecked, the lawn will end up with a major problem.

“Why should this be a problem?”

Too much thatch buildup can cause several problems. Thatch is a prime habitat for undesirable insects. Chinch bugs love thatch. The conditions caused by temperature and humidity in thatch also makes it a perfect environment for disease. Thatchy lawns also are more prone to scalping from lawn mowers, foot printing, and diminished resistance to heat, cold and drought. When a

buildup of thatch occurs, there is a tendency for the roots of the grass plant to grow more and more in the thatch layer rather than in the soil. Thatch dries more quickly than soil and consequently your lawn will suffer.

Any factor that encourages too much root or plant growth, or retards the natural course of decomposition, increases the thatch layer. These factors can come from many sources, man made, or naturally. In nature, some types of turfgrass produce more thatch than others. Soil conditions such as poor pH, heavy or excessively wet soils, and

even temperature can slow or eliminate the necessary fungi and bacteria that are needed to break down the thatch layer. Improper heavy nitrogen fertilization can contribute to thatch buildup by causing the turf to grow too vigorously and produce more roots and stems than can easily be broken down.

Getting rid of thatch is very time consuming and expensive. It is easier to prevent than remove excessive thatch. Appropriate cultural practices such as proper fertilizing, watering, mowing, and aeration, will greatly reduce and even stop thatch buildup.