Sugarcane Mosaic Virus in Palm Beach County

Sugarcane Mosaic Virus (SCMV) was found in November 2014 in western Boynton Beach and Wellington, Florida. It is now more widespread throughout Palm Beach and several other Florida counties. SCMV was first discovered in St. Augustinegrass in the summer may mask these symptoms.

Floratam variety of St. Augustinegrass was introduced in the 1970’s to resist another turf virus. It became the most popular variety of St. Augustinegrass in Florida due to its superior characteristics.

Currently, Bitterblue and Palmetto varieties of St. Augustinegrass are the recommended replacements. However, chinch bugs and fungal problems may be greater than with Floratam. This fungal issue is especially true with Palmetto variety in southern Florida.

SCMV also attacks Bermudagrass, paspalum, bahiagrass, other commercially available St. Augustinegrass varieties, fountain grass, and sorghum, but they are not killed by it. Zoysiagrass is unaffected by the virus. Additional variety resistance trials are being conducted by the University of Florida.

SCMV weakens Floratam so that other problems like take-all rootrot and weeds often develop. Currently, only avoidance and planting resistant varieties are available as options.

Ongoing University of Florida SCMV research includes:
- Resistant turf variety testing
- Mowing equipment sanitation procedures refinement
- Determination and confirmation of genetic makeup of the disease causing viruses.

What Can You Do?

No pesticide (fungicides, insecticides, etc.) eradicates SCMV in the turf. The virus cannot be transmitted via soil. Living tissue, or moist plant sap must be involved. SCMV management includes:
- Sanitize mowing equipment after SCMV infected turf is cut
- If possible, avoid mowing when the grass is wet. Moisture keeps the plant sap viable longer.
- Promote the most vigorous growth possible with best management practices for fertilization, watering, mowing height and fungal management. See http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh010
- Re-sod, sprig or plug with recommended varieties to replace dying Floratam.

If desired, overseed in the winter with annual or perennial ryegrass when the Floratam may look worst; or colorize with a turf dye.

For additional information, contact the Palm Beach County Master Gardener Hotline at 561.233.1750 or email mgardenfwd@pbcgov.org

Check out Phil Harmon, PhD’s SCMV publication at: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp313

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