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TURF TIP TIME #15 with the NJTA: Identifying Kyllinga Before It Rears Its Ugly Head

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but most turfgrass managers will agree that false-green kyllinga yields some unattractive seedheads. A notable problem in the southern counties of New Jersey, the weed has been creeping its way up to the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions over the past several years.

The nuisance is a warm-season perennial weed that emerges in late spring/early summer when soil temperatures increase.



“It looks a lot like a desirable grass,” said Dr. Matthew Elmore, a Weed Science Extension Specialist at Rutgers University. “Because it looks so much like regular turf, I think some people don’t notice it until those ugly seedheads are produced.”

When kyllinga is in bloom, a green seedhead, that resembles a starburst, grows above a triangular stem and three-ranked leaves. It forms a dense mat and continues to expand as the underground stems (rhizomes) spread outwards, ultimately displacing the desired turfgrass.

If you have just a small patch, it can be sod cut out because kyllinga does not have underground tubers. However, more extreme and costly measures must be taken to manage wide-spread infestations.

“The key is knowing you have it. First, you need to identify the plant as false-green kyllinga and then determine exactly where it is,” said Dr. Elmore. “It’s not always going to be across the entire property. It’s usually going to be in the wet areas.”

He offers three tips for identifying this three-leafed starburst weed.



1. False-green kyllinga usually grows a lighter green color.



2. If you crush or mow it, kyllinga is fragrant, almost like potpourri. "Most weeds smell terrible, but this smells pretty good actually. You could make a candle out of it," Matt chuckled.



3. Kyllinga goes dormant and turns brown at the first fall frost. The bronze colored patches stand out among the cool season grasses that stay green throughout the year.

Once you determine that the weed infecting your property is false-green kyllinga, you can start an herbicide program in conjunction with cultural practices to address the underlying cause of its competitive advantage. But first things first, you must identify the weed before it rears its ugly seedhead.

For more information, [view the full false-green kyllinga fact sheet here](#) .

[Photos from Matthew Elmore and James A. Murphy]



NJTA's TURF TIP TIME Brought to You By:
Dr. Matthew Elmore

A Weed Science Extension Specialist at Rutgers University, Matt earned his B.S. in Turfgrass Science from Penn State University before earning an M.S. and Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee. Prior to joining the Scarlet Knights, Matt was a Turfgrass Extension Specialist for Texas A&M AgriLife in Dallas. His research at Rutgers is focused on novel strategies to control weeds with fewer pesticide inputs.



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