

Lawn Burn: The Cause & The Cure

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Lawn burn is a common problem that occurs when your dog's urine damages the grass in your lawn. If you have ever had to deal with this problem, you know how frustrating it is and how difficult it can be to prevent. There are many home remedies that promise to correct this problem, but most of them are ineffective and a few of them can actually make the situation worse. This article will describe the cause and contributing factors of lawn burn and give recommendations for preventing this problem in your own yard.



Identify the culprit

Before you start implementing changes to correct lawn burn, you need to make sure that your dog is actually the culprit. Several lawn diseases can look like lawn burn, causing small, characteristic brown patches. First, make sure that the brown spots are in areas where your dog urinates. Most dogs will have an area in the yard that they choose to use when they relieve themselves. Second, make sure that the grass in the brown spots is still firmly attached. Grab a handful and give it a steady pull. If the grass is firmly rooted, that points to lawn burn. If the whole bunch of grass pulls up, roots and all, then you may be dealing with a grub problem. And third, make sure that your own dog is the problem. If neighborhood dogs are coming into your yard and causing the problem, treating your own dog won't help.

Understand the cause

Lawn burn is caused by the nitrogen in dog urine. Because dog urine is very high in nitrogen-containing waste products, when the dog urinates, it is similar to pouring a nitrogen-containing fertilizer on the lawn. A little nitrogen is good for the grass, but an excess causes damage. The prevention of lawn burn involves trying to reduce the amount of nitrogen coming into contact with the grass.

Contributing factors

There are several factors that make lawn burn more likely to occur:

- Female dogs are more likely to cause lawn burn than males because females void their entire bladder in one location instead of lifting their leg and marking, like males.
- Large dogs deposit more urine so they increase the quantity of nitrogen in one location, making lawn burn more likely.
- Dogs fed a very high protein diet are more likely to produce a urine that causes lawn burn. Nitrogen is one of the substances excreted when protein is broken down; the more protein, the more nitrogen and the more chance of lawn burn.
- Heavily fertilized yards are already receiving near maximum levels of nitrogen. The additional amount of nitrogen in dog urine may be all that is needed to put these lawns over the edge and cause lawn burn.
- Lawns that are stressed are more susceptible to damage. Lawns that are suffering from drought, disease, or are newly sodded or seeded are more susceptible to lawn burn.

Solving the problem

Successfully treating and preventing lawn burn often requires a multi-step approach.

1. Saturate the urinated spots with water. After the pet urinates, pour several cupfuls of water on the spot to dilute the urine. A watering can works well.
2. Feed a high quality dog food that does not exceed your pet's protein requirement. High quality foods also have more digestible protein sources that are more completely utilized by the pet and create less nitrogenous waste in the urine.
3. Encouraging your dog to drink more water will help dilute the urine and decrease the risk of lawn burn. Small amounts of low sodium broth in the drinking water may help increase your dog's water intake.
4. Train your dog to urinate in a location that is less visible. This approach is very effective for owners who do not want to add supplements to their dogs' diet.
5. Replant your yard with more urine-resistant grasses. The most resistant grasses tend to be perennial ryegrasses and fescues. The most sensitive tend to be Kentucky bluegrass and Bermuda.
6. Feed your dog a supplement like Doctors Foster and Smith Lawn Guard, or apply a product to the lawn such as Spot Gone Lawn Treatment. These products bind and neutralize the nitrogen in your pet's urine.
7. Reduce the stress on your lawn by not over- or under-fertilizing and by watering frequently.
8. If neighbors' dogs are causing the problem, using a fence or motion-activated sprinkler may be helpful in keeping

these dogs off of your lawn.

One Final Note

All lawn burn products are not the same. Some oral lawn burn products contain the ingredient methionine, an amino acid that, at higher doses, can lower the urine pH, acidifying the urine. If the pH of the urine becomes too acidic, urinary tract problems, such as urine crystals and certain types of bladder stones, may result. We recommend choosing products that do not change the urine pH. Effective lawn burn products often contain the ingredient Yucca schidigera, which helps bind the nitrogen in the urine, so that less is excreted onto the grass. Finally, although lawn burn products can be very helpful, you may still get the best result by using a multi-faceted approach- for example more frequent watering in years when there is less rain.