

## Turf Mites (Winter Mites & Clover Mites)

(Primarily **Brown Wheat Mite**, **Banks Grass Mite**, **Clover Mite**, and related species)

Turf mites are **tiny, sap-feeding arachnids** that cause **dry, straw-colored patches**, usually during **late winter to early spring** when grass is stressed and moisture is low. In Colorado, **winter turf mite damage is extremely common**, especially on **south- and west-facing slopes**.



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### Seasonal Activity Calendar

Icons: 🌸 Spring | ☀️ Summer | 🍂 Fall | ❄️ Winter

#### Mite Group

**Winter Mites** (Brown Wheat Mite, Clover Mite)

**Summer Mites** (Banks Grass Mite)

#### Active Season

Late Fall–Winter–Early Spring

Hot, dry summers

#### Icons



## Symptoms (Homeowner-Friendly)

### What Homeowners See

<u>Symptom</u>	<u>Description</u>
<b>Straw-colored or tan patches</b>	Often appear in late winter or early spring
<b>Damage on south/west exposures</b>	Areas receiving winter sun dry out quickly
<b>Grass looks dead but roots may still be viable</b>	Especially with winter mites
<b>Slow spring green-up</b>	Turf recovers unevenly
<b>Mites extremely small</b>	Size of a speck of pepper; hard to see without magnification

### Diagnosis Tips

- Inspect blades closely for **tiny moving dots**.
- Lay white paper on turf and tap blades → mites appear as **very small dark or reddish specks**.
- If damage occurred during snow-free, sunny winter periods → almost always **winter mite**.

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### Primary Causes (Colorado Conditions)

- **Lack of winter watering**
  - **Hot, sunny winter days drying soil**
  - **South- and west-facing slopes** with minimal snow cover
  - **Poor fall fertilization** (weakens turf over winter)
  - **Heat and drought** (for Banks grass mites in summer)
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## Treatment & Management

### 1. MOST IMPORTANT: Proper Winter Watering

#### Practice

#### Benefit

Water **every 3–4 weeks** during dry winters

Prevents turf desiccation and mite outbreaks

Focus on **slopes, sunny areas, and edges**

These dry out first and suffer the most damage

Water **midday** when temps >40°F

Allows absorption without freezing

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### 2. Cultural Practices for Recovery

#### Action

#### Why it Helps

**Aeration in spring**

Helps roots recover from desiccation

**Light spring fertilization**

Encourages green-up and new growth

**Overseed thin areas**

Tall fescue helps mask recurring damage

**Maintain 3–3.5" mowing height**

Reduces turf stress and moisture loss

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### 3. Insecticides / Miticides

Chemical control is **rarely necessary** and **only somewhat effective** because mites are active when weather is cold or extremely hot.

#### Mite Type

#### Control Notes

**Winter Mites**

Least responsive to chemicals → **winter watering is the real control**

## Mite Type

## Control Notes

### **Summer Mites (Banks grass mite)**

Can be treated with **miticides** (abamectin, bifenthrin, acequinocyl) if necessary

**Important:** Do **not** apply miticides in freezing conditions or on drought-stressed turf.

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## **When to Worry vs. When It's Cosmetic**

### ● **When to Worry (action recommended)**

- Large brown areas in **late winter or early spring**
- Turf not greening up by mid-spring
- Damage appears every winter on the same slopes
- Turf feels crunchy/dry and roots are thin
- No winter watering has been done

These require **winter watering + spring overseeding + aeration**.

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### ● **Mostly Cosmetic (monitor only)**

- Small patches greening up slowly
- Minor winter discoloration
- Only edges or sunny corners affected
- Grass recovers within 2–4 weeks of warm weather
- Mites present but turf not thinning significantly

Most mite damage is **preventable** with simple winter watering.