

# Mean Seeds: Grass Kills



Two things you must know - first, **grass can kill your dog**. Hard to believe, isn't it? But the invasive awns (seeds) from some forms of grass, likely inhaled, travel through your dog's

body and create infection from bacteria they bring in with them, or pick up from places like the oral cavity as they enter.

Second, **you are your dog's best defense against this danger**. Learn to recognize threats and avoid them, and carefully observe and know your dog. Recognizing subtle changes early may make a huge difference in successful treatment should your dog fall prey to a grass awn infection.

The most common grass threats to our dogs:

- Foxtail barley - if you live, train and/or compete in the western United States or Alaska.
- Cheatgrass - a known threat in the Rocky Mountain states. Residents know that this becomes a problem when the grass begins to dry and drop its seeds, sometime around July, through the first freeze or snow.
- Canada wild rye - unlike the above, this grass is actively cultivated as an effective cover crop for other, slower to establish grasses. It features a particularly aggressive awn. Popular with state and federal conservation authorities, and bird and habitat preservation organizations due to its low cost, it has become widespread through the Midwest and Mideastern states over the past ten years.

Find a full list of known problem grass species at <http://www.meanseeds.com>

Grass awn infections can manifest in multiple symptom patterns (or combinations thereof): pyothorax (an infection in the chest cavity), pneumonia, and/or body wall or internal abscesses.

Based on my experience and the case histories I am gathering, many infections show up as an acute illness. The dog seemed fine two hours ago/yesterday, but now s/he has an elevated temperature, is lethargic, and has no interest in food. The flowchart on the reverse side of this page provides an analysis of the diagnosis and treatment process.

Note from the flowchart that the symptoms of a grass awn infection overlap those of other fairly common threats, such as tickborne disease. Your powers of observation may be key in making an accurate diagnosis quickly. If you have reason to suspect that your dog has been exposed to a problem grass, make your veterinarian aware of that fact and the likely manifestations. Veterinarians that do not see many working dogs in their practice may not consider the grass awn possibility in their early workup.

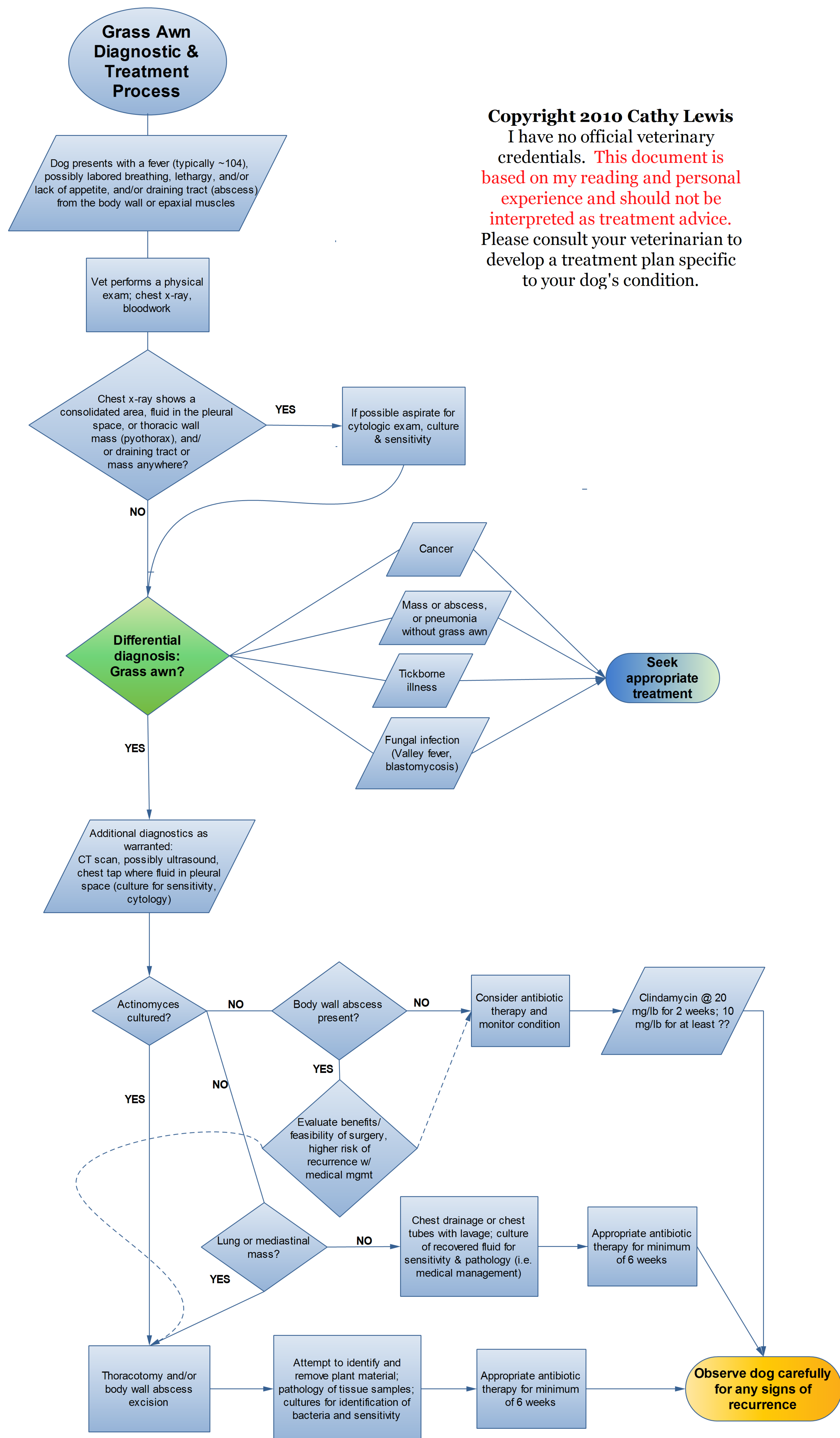
Treatment in most cases is costly. Even "medical management" of a pyothorax is most times not a matter of simply giving some pills. With my own dogs, treatment costs have ranged from approximately \$1,000 to \$12,000. In this tough economy, many of us may be forced to make a choice as to whether we can afford to attempt treatment. That's a heartbreaking state of affairs when the life of our best friend and hunting companion hangs in the balance. If you believe your dog is at risk, consider pet insurance.

In most cases that I am aware of where treatment has successfully resolved the infection, the dog's health has been restored to the point of returning to the field, though for competition dogs the consequences of surgery, e.g. removal of a lung lobe, ribs, and/or muscle tissue may affect performance to the point where retirement becomes advisable.

Sadly, the threat of grass awn infection appears to be rising. **You** are your dog's best defense.

## The Grass Awn Project

<http://www.meanseeds.com>



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I have no official veterinary credentials. This document is based on my reading and personal experience and should not be interpreted as treatment advice.

Please consult your veterinarian to develop a treatment plan specific to your dog's condition.

Many thanks to Dr. Matthew Rooney of Aspen Meadow Veterinary Specialists ([www.AspenMeadowVet.com](http://www.AspenMeadowVet.com)) for his patience in answering my many questions in preparing this diagram.

If you have had a dog with a grass awn infection, *please* submit a case history report online at <http://www.meanseeds.com> or download a report form to submit via mail. Your dog's experience will help others!