Friday’s Feature
By
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Mushrooms and Other Nuisance Fungi in Lawns

Recent showers have provided many of our previously drought stricken lawns with some extended soil and turf wetness. And that has stimulated the appearance of some strange looking things.

Mushrooms and slime molds are two rather common groups of fungi that are mostly a nuisance in the lawn.

On turfgrass, slime molds cause a crusty or powdery coating on turf foliage. The dusty coating may be ashy-gray, purple, brown or charcoal-gray. When you look closely, you see tiny, round balls scattered over the plant. If you rub these balls between your fingers, a sooty-like powder will cover them. This sooty-like powder is the reproductive spores of the fungi.

Slime molds belong to a ‘primitive’ class of fungi called Myxomycetes. It is a small group of organisms with only 700 species known worldwide.

Slime molds can be found in lawns, flower beds, gardens, and anywhere organic matter is present. Spores germinate into structures that can eventually merge together and form a large plasmodium, otherwise known as ‘the blob’. A plasmodium is a shapeless growing mass that may reach two feet in diameter. As conditions dry, this blob dries to a crusty or dusty ‘crud’ on your grass or soil.

Slime molds are organisms that obtain their nutrients from dead or decaying matter and are most prevalent following extended periods of wetness. They do not feed on living plants, but only use them for support during reproduction. The damage to turf and other plants would be only from shading them from sunlight, which may cause the leaf blades to temporarily turn yellow.

Since they most often occur in wet weather, they disappear rapidly as soon as it becomes dry. Control is usually not necessary. You can break up the masses by sweeping with a broom or by spraying with a strong stream of water.
If the grass is actively growing, slime mold can be mowed off with the clippings. Since slime molds feed on thatch, avoid thatch buildup or dethatch at the appropriate time.

Mushrooms also have been popping up everywhere in water soaked lawns. These can be more problematic as many of these fleshy fungi are toxic to mammals and can also be associated with fairy rings in the lawn.

Mushrooms, also called toadstools or puffballs, are fruiting bodies of soil fungi. They appear in lawns during wet weather. Mushrooms live on organic matter such as roots and stumps in the soil. Most don't harm the lawn but are unsightly.

Mushrooms that grow in arcs or circles of dark green grass are called fairy rings. The arcs or rings enlarge from 3 inches to 2 feet each season as the fungi grows outward. The fairy ring fungus may interfere with water flow through the soil and stress the lawn. Contact your local Extension Service if you think you may have a fairy ring.

There is no chemical control for mushrooms. Time is the best cure. Once the buried wood has completely decayed the mushrooms will disappear.

Because mushrooms are merely the fruiting bodies of fungi, removing them does not kill the underground mycelia from which they are growing. However, picking mushrooms, puffballs, stinkhorns, or other reproductive structures soon after they appear may prevent their spores from spreading to new sites.

The primary reasons for removing mushrooms from lawns are to keep them away from children and pets and to improve the lawn's appearance.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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