

MUSHROOMS AND PUFFBALLS IN LAWNS

Mushrooms, puffballs and toadstools are fruiting bodies of fungus organisms. These fungi feed primarily on organic matter. When found in the lawn, they are feeding on organic matter in the soil. This organic matter may be pieces of wood, lumber, dead tree roots or similar materials. Or, it may come from the grass plant itself. Constant growth of new roots and dying of the old roots results in much of the organic matter accumulating in the soil of lawns.

Since mushrooms, puffballs and toadstools result from fungi feeding on organic matter in the soil, they seldom affect the growth of lawn grass. They do not feed on, injure or thin the grass when feeding on soil organic matter.

FAIRY RINGS AN EXCEPTION

The “Fairy Ring” fungus, *Marasmius oreades*, causes rings or semicircles of dark green grass from one to thirty feet in diameter. Mushrooms and puffballs are often found within the ring. Dead grass is often found on the inside of the ring adjacent to the outer ring of dark green grass.

Fairy Ring fungus kills grass by smothering the root system. Fungus mycelium are so dense in the soil that water can’t penetrate and the grass cannot grow. The green part of the Fairy Ring is the result of nitrogen released by the fungus as it feeds on the soil organic matter.

ARE MUSHROOMS OR PUFFBALLS POISONOUS?

It is difficult to know. It is quite difficult to identify the different kinds of mushrooms or puffballs and to know whether or not they are poisonous. This is a job for a person who knows mushrooms well – a mycologist.

CONTROL OF MUSHROOMS AND PUFFBALLS IN THE LAWN

The following practices won’t eliminate them from the lawn, but will reduce the problem:

1. Remove large roots and large pieces of organic debris before planting a lawn. Do not use excessive amounts of organic mulches, such as sawdust, bark dust and peat moss.
2. Fertilize and water to promote good grass growth. This helps grass provide competition to the mushrooms and puffballs.
3. Mow regularly. Mowing removes the mushrooms and puffballs, which serve as a source of further infection in the lawn.

FAIRY RING CONTROL

The above controls for mushrooms, puffballs and toadstools will give some help in controlling Fairy Ring, but this fungus is more difficult. These additional practices may be helpful:

1. Soak Fairy Ring area daily for a month with water. Punching a number of holes in the area to be soaked will help get the water into the soil. The Fairy Ring area is often dry, hard and difficult to get water into the soil. A thorough aeration in April with a rented machine will make the job easier.
2. Adequate fertilizer will mask the green ring by supplying the entire lawn with extra nitrogen.
3. Renovation of affected area can be accomplished by removing the affected sod and soil. Cut the area 12 inches wider than the outside of the ring. Cut the sod and soil 1-2 inches deep. Remove affected material. Replace with “clean” soil and replant.

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