

Mushrooms and Fairy Rings

You may step out into your backyard one morning and see where the fairies have danced, leaving behind a ring of mushrooms. Welsh and Celtic tales warn of the dangers of entering a fairy ring and the Dutch believe that the Devil creates the ring to hide his butter churn and that cows in the pasture should not disturb the ring. Other folklore suggest that fairy rings should be considered a good luck symbol.

In Oklahoma, it is very common to see mushrooms spring from the soil, especially after a wet, rainy period. When these mushrooms form a ring in turf grass they are referred to as “fairy rings”. Approximately 50 species of fungi are known to form fairy rings in turf. Fairy rings start from a piece of mycelium or spore at a single point, they can then grow outward forming a ring. There is a large fairy ring in France that is estimated to be over 700 years old. Fairy rings occur in the same spot each year and seem to be more prevalent in soil that is sandy, dry, and that lacks nutrients.

Fairy rings do not attack the grass directly but break down organic matter in and under the soil such as the site in which a tree has been cut down or a previously wooded area. Once this organic material is depleted, the fairy ring will disappear. Fairy rings will never cross one another as fungal activity will stop when they touch.

Sometimes a fairy ring can result in brown grass and some fungi can penetrate and kill grass roots or create a barrier to water absorption. Some methods of eliminating fairy rings which are destroying the turf include the following: 1) **Fertilizing**- nitrogen fertilizer to green the surrounding turf; 2) **Aeration**- aerate the soil with a rented aerator; 3) **Remove**- dig up undecomposed tree roots or stumps, wood scraps, or other organic debris; 4) **Thatch**- eliminate thatch buildup; 5) **Fungicide**- fungicides are available, but most are available only to licensed applicators.

Never eat mushrooms that appear in your lawn as many species may very well be poisonous. Harmless species can appear identical to species that are harmful. Don't take chances.