

Managing Fairy Rings and Mushrooms in Your Turf

Many of us have seen mushrooms integrated on a variety of lawns throughout the city. These mushrooms live off decaying organic matter (e.g. dead tree roots) in the soil. As they develop, they form a ring referred to as a Fairy Ring*. And heavy rains increase the growth of the mushrooms.

Aside from the fact that they are unsightly, fairy rings can cause serious damage to turf. The disease can produce a dense fungal mat that prevents water from penetrating the grass roots. The rings form a fungus called *Marasmius oreades* which includes the vegetative part of a fungus called mycelium. The fungus lives underground and grows outward in a circle. As the mycelium grows, it grabs up all the soil's nutrients and ends up starving the grass. As a result, you will see a dark green circle or multiple circles ranging in size from just a few inches to more than 200 feet in diameter. Typically, mushrooms will develop around the edge of the infected area.

Despite the awful impact of Fairy Rings, there are some steps you can take to promote a healthy lawn and minimize the occurrence of this awful disease:

1. Remove excess thatch and aerate compacted soils. Use a thatching rake and rake in one direction to prevent damaging grass roots. After removing the thatch layer, clean the lawn with a metal leaf rake
2. Encourage beneficial soil microbes by top dressing with a humus builder such as well aged manure or finished compost
3. Common fungicides have not yet been proven to be effective. However, *Physan 20* works on many disease outbreaks that impact turf. If you decide to use this approach, read and follow the label directions carefully. Typically, one pint (diluted) will treat 6,400 square feet.
4. Do not use fertilizers that are rich in nitrogen as they can mask the symptoms by causing the rest of your lawn to green up. Try using a deep root feeder to aerate and irrigate dead/dying rings
5. Gently remove mushrooms by giving them a tug and pulling them up. You may want to consider putting them in your compost pile. In either case, DO NOT ALLOW THEM TO REMAIN ON YOUR LAWN.
6. Keep lawns well-watered. Always think water, aerate, fertilize, and MOW!

Once the disease appears, it is difficult to eliminate. There is NO natural control for Fairy Rings and mushrooms in our lawn, turf, and grass – they are here to stay. Understanding their impact to our landscape and how to manage them is the key to minimizing their longer-term adverse effects.

* The name "fairy ring" comes from an old folktale where people believed that mushrooms appeared where fairies danced the night before.