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Fairy Ring Mushrooms No Harm to Your Lawn, But Can Turn You ‘Green in the Gills’

Mushrooms have started popping up in peoples’ lawns recently, and people have been calling in with questions about these mushrooms. Are they a sign of problems in the lawn? Could they make my children or pets sick? The answer is, as with most things in horticulture, it depends.

Mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of many, *many* different species of fungi, and almost all mushrooms grow out of their food source. Mushrooms can either be saprophytic or parasitic. Saprophytic fungi will grow off of organic matter that is already dead and decaying. Parasitic fungi will grow on live organic matter and rot the plant it’s growing on.

When mushrooms grow in your yard, 95% of the time, they are going to be saprophytic. Yards, where grass clippings are recycled back into the soil during mowing, are more likely to encourage mushroom growth. If you don’t recycle grass clippings but are still seeing mushrooms, it is likely that you have excessive thatch buildup encouraging the mushroom growth. Breaking up the thatch will not only solve your mushroom problem but also keep the roots of your turfgrass healthy.

Sometimes mushrooms will grow in a circle or arc. These are commonly called fairy rings. They are a sign that the mycelium, or the roots of the fungus, have spread throughout the soil in the entire circle. These mushrooms are saprophytic so they won’t rot your turf, but can cause water retention problems within the circle which could kill off grass in drier years. Sometimes fairy rings are harder to spot because there are no mushrooms. In these cases, there will be a circle of grass that is either dying or significantly greener than the surrounding grass. Fairy rings in lawns typically won’t need treatment, but it is generally a good idea to mow down any mushrooms since most that grow in fairy rings are toxic, albeit non-fatal.

It is important to keep an eye on pets and small children who might be tempted to put the mushroom from the lawn into their mouths. One of the most commonly consumed poisonous mushrooms is the false parasol, aka *Chlorophyllum molybdites*, aka the Vomiter, which should give you a vivid mental image of how much fun you’re going to have after eating one. These are found in open turfgrass in and out of fairy rings in many yards during the cool seasons, as well as after consistent rain. The reason so many people eat this mushroom and then suffer severe

gastrointestinal symptoms is because it is a close look-alike to a commonly consumed mushroom called the parasol.

Never eat or let anyone else eat a mushroom that you are not 100% sure of the identity of, and if you think that you have ingested a poisonous mushroom, contact your local poison control center. Better yet, get a second opinion on the mushroom's identity and edibility before eating it or letting children and pets play around it. And a third. And maybe even a fourth.

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