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MOISTURE, MOSS AND MUSHROOMS

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The cool, cloudy conditions with some moisture we recently had increased mushroom and moss growth in lawns. Mushrooms are not a concern for lawns. The conditions allowing moss to grow can decrease turfgrass growth and should be amended.

I'm often asked if mushrooms growing in lawns are a sign of disease and if fungicides will control them. The answer is no and using a fungicide would be a waste of money and an unnecessary pesticide application.

While mushrooms are a fungus, fungicides will not control them, especially at this life cycle stage. Mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of fungi and most are not pathogenic; meaning they do not infect plants to cause a disease.

Along with mushrooms, the fungus is a mass of mycelium growing in or on organic matter like dead tree roots or turf thatch. They are beneficial in decomposing dead organic matter that naturally occurs in landscapes, increasing soil organic matter and some nutrients.

Cloudy and moist conditions promote development of the fruiting structure or mushroom. Once conditions become warmer and dryer, mushrooms will decrease. If they continue, check lawn irrigation practices to be sure you're not overwatering.

While these mushrooms are not likely poisonous, they are not edible. Hand remove them to avoid children or pets eating them; otherwise there is no need to be concerned about lawn mushrooms.

If you wonder how fungicides work against fungal pathogens, here's how. When fungicides are applied for plant diseases, they are applied to foliage prior to infection. When a fungal spore lands on the leaf, the fungicide then kills the germinating spore before it infects the leaf. Timing of application is critical for plant diseases.

Moss is a persistent weed that grows where turfgrass is thin and weak. To control moss, consider the reasons it is growing in the lawn and correct them. Moss is associated with compacted soil, poor fertility, heavy shade, and excess moisture.

For effective moss control, modify conditions to favor turfgrass. Reduce soil compaction with core aeration. Use proper fertilization and maintain a three and one-half inch mowing height. Too low of mowing encourages moss.

Reduce watering in shady areas where less water is needed compared to full sun areas. If feasible, prune trees and shrubs to improve air circulation and increase light penetration.

Once soil compaction and overwatering or overfertilizing in shady areas is amended, a shade tolerant grass could be sown into the area. Some Kentucky bluegrass cultivars are more shade tolerant and tall fescue is considered shade tolerant.

If a shade tolerant grass will not grow in the area, replace turf with shade plants such as Hosta, ferns or groundcovers like Lamium, Adjuva or periwinkle.

Moss control products containing iron or copper sulfate will eliminate moss if label directions are followed; however, if poor growing conditions are not amended, turfgrass will not do well and moss will return.

21 June 7 PSAs (kfeehan2@unl.edu) (402-563-4901)

If you have tall Sedum, like Autumn Joy, that flop open when they bloom later in summer, this can be avoided by cutting plants back to half their height in early June. This will not interfere with blooming, but will encourage a more compact plant much less likely to flop. Cutting tall sedums back also encourages branching which increases the number of flower clusters in August and September. To cut my Autumn Joy Sedum, I use a long, serrated cake knife to basically saw the plants to half their height. A pruning shears can be used as well. The plants appear a little chopped up after doing this, and it takes a couple of weeks before they respond with new growth; but by mid to late August the sedums are full and loaded with flower clusters, and they rarely flop open. The key is to not cut late blooming plants back too late in spring. Once late June arrives, cutting plants back can result in delayed blooming close to a freeze.

At this time of year, hackberry trees sometimes drop leaves or have leaves yellowing and dropping. While a concern for tree owners, this is an occasional problem with hackberries that typically does not lead to anything harmful. Leaf drop of hackberry stops and, if needed, otherwise healthy trees produce new leaves and the trees are fine the rest of the season. While we are not sure why hackberry does this, this year it is likely due to our unusual spring weather. We went from cold temperatures to hot temperatures, then back to cold temperatures and more. Extremes in weather can cause hackberries to shed leaves. It may also be something as simple as we did not get a late spring freeze this year to injure some leaf buds so the trees simply had more leaves than needed and dropped some during the hot temperatures so they did not need to support as many leaves. In any case, most hackberries dropping leaves now will be fine.

As vegetable gardens are mulched to control weeds and conserve soil moisture, here are some tips for good results and to help avoid issues if mulch is used incorrectly. Hay and straw are popular mulches but may contain weed or volunteer grain seeds. Grass clippings can be used as mulch but need to be applied as a thin layer, only 2 to 3 inches thick. Grass clippings also need to be dry because wet clipping can mold and become matted so water can't pass through. And do not use clippings from lawns treated with a weed killer until some time has passed. With most types of herbicides, or weed killers, clippings from the fourth mowing after treatment may be used. However, read the label. If a lawn was treated with a product containing quinclorac, such as Drive, the clippings should not be used as mulch. If the herbicide used states it is a crabgrass killer, it may contain quinclorac. (Source: Ward Upham K-State)

Some trees and shrubs produce a fair amount of nuisance suckers. This is succulent growth that typically occurs from roots near the base of the trunk or stems. Some suckers may be found throughout a landscape bed or even in the lawn. Trees and shrubs that regularly produce suckers include crabapples, purple leaved plums, and lilacs. If suckering is undesired, avoid planting these plants. If you already have one in your landscape, sucker control is best done by pruning or mowing off suckers on a regular basis. While there are commercial products labeled as stopping sucker growth, these products do not stop suckers, but may slow their redevelopment. If a tree or shrub not known as a sucker producer suddenly begins to develop suckers, this may be a sign the tree is stressed; typically from environmental stresses for which there is no control but to use mulch and watering correctly to help reduce stress.

During rainy or cloudy weather, I'm asked if fungicides will control mushrooms growing in lawns. The answer is no; and trying this would be a waste of money and an unnecessary pesticide application. While mushrooms are a fungus, fungicides will not control them at this stage of their life cycle. And most are not pathogenic; meaning they do not infect plants and cause a disease. They are beneficial since they are part of the decomposition process of dead organic matter that naturally occurs in landscapes, like thatch in lawns or dead tree roots. When we have good moisture, we see more mushrooms which are the fruiting bodies of the fungus. Once conditions become warm and dry, production of mushrooms will decrease. If they continue, check lawn irrigation practices to be sure you're not overwatering. While lawn mushrooms are not likely poisonous, they are not edible. Hand remove them to avoid children or pets eating them.