Snow Melt Uncovers Surprises

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

Release: Week of February 12, 2024

As snow melted last week, some people found a few surprises in lawns. While not common, three I was asked about were webs on the lawn beneath snow, soil mounds, and trails or tunnels in the turf.

If a lawn appeared to have webs or mold on it after the snow melted, this was most likely gray snow mold. What appeared to be spider webs was mycelium, which is fungal growth that appears as fine white, thread-like hyphae and could appear web-like.

There are two types of snow mold that infect turfgrass beneath snow or matted leaves. Each is caused by a different fungus and they're referred to as pink and gray snow mold. Like most diseases, specific conditions are required for infection to occur so snow molds are not common. Management of each is the same.

Snow mold tends to show up where shoveling or snowplowing created deep snow on a lawn, especially for prolonged periods. Circular patches may have a moldy and matted appearance when the fungus is active, usually just as snow melts. As the lawn dries out, fungal growth slows and patches turn light tan, then fade to light gray or white if it is gray snow mold. Pink snow mold may have a pinkish tint.

Kentucky bluegrass is rarely killed by snow mold disease and fungicide applications are not recommended for lawns. Spring fungicide applications, if used, will not control or prevent snow mold in the future.

This spring, rake dead or matted material to increase air circulation and drying. Once spring growth begins, the area will regrow or fill in and recover. If recovery is slow, core aerate the lawns and over-seed to speed recovery.

When soil mounds appear in a lawn during winter, it is most likely mole activity. Moles do not hibernate in winter. They burrow year-round in search of ants and earthworms, their main food source, and other insects.

Mounds are created when moles burrow deeper or tunnel under solid objects such as tree roots or sidewalks and push extra soil to the surface.

A single mole can create an extensive network of burrows. Moles live alone, but burrow systems of several moles may be connected. Breeding occurs in February and March, with young arriving 42 days later. Females produce one litter of four or five young per year.

If soil mounds appear in winter, rake to flatten and spread them out. If mole control is needed, trapping, toxic baits, and repellants can be tried during the growing season. Mole management is challenging. For information on control, refer to our NebGuide "Moles and Their Control" found at extensionpubs.unl.edu.

Trails or tunnels in the lawn after snow melts are caused by voles feeding. Voles scar lawns by constructing runways and clipping grass very close to roots. While concerning when it is found, the damage is not permanent and the lawn recovers during spring growth.

Vole damage is most costly when a shortage of preferable foods forces voles to eat the inner green layers of bark on trees and shrubs. The gnawing required to reach this layer can severely damage or kill many young trees and shrubs. Hardware cloth placed on young trees in late fall or now is the best prevention.

Voles can also damage or consume flower bulbs during winter. If bulbs do not grow and bloom this spring, voles may be the culprit. The NebGuide "Controlling Vole Damage" is also available at extensionpubs.unl.edu.