

I Have Mushrooms in My Lawn, Now What?

Mushrooms growing in a lawn can look unsightly. Especially if the homeowner makes an effort to keep broadleaf weeds, crabgrass and other invaders from disrupting their monoculture of perennial grasses.

My first instinct is to recommend that you just stop fighting “invaders” in your lawn and just enjoy nature’s diversity. As it pertains to mushrooms, that is the only option since there are no effective treatments.

The extremely wet weather we have experienced for the last eighteen months or so has encouraged mushroom growth from time to time. It would be helpful to understand a bit more about what we are seeing. When we see mushrooms what we are really seeing is what is known as a fruiting body. Mushrooms are fungi which is why lawn applications intended to prevent weeds and crabgrass have no effect on them. But more importantly, the mycelium or the main presence of the fungi are always living in your soil. They are a critically important part of a healthy soil ecosystem. They are among the millions of species of microbes that determine whether or not your soil is healthy. As we learn more about the soil ecosystem some scientists describe their role as “the rulers” since their interaction with plants is critical for everything we see above-ground. The fruiting bodies are just the spore-producing reproductive phase of some of these permanent residents.

Ironically, we recently saw mushroom fruiting bodies in lawns that were turning toward dormancy due to droughty conditions. While this is somewhat unusual one just has to consider a couple of factors to understand why this would occur. First, we had another abnormally wet spring which encouraged the soil mycelium to move into their reproductive, spore-producing phase. Secondly, most lawns have notoriously shallow root systems. So when we are at or near the summer solstice, just ten days or so without rain is enough to send our turf headlong toward dormancy. It just so happened that these two environmental factors crossed over each other earlier this summer.

If you want your lawn to look its best throughout the growing season and coincidentally discourage the appearance of unsightly elements in your lawn, there are some things you should do. Keep your mower blades sharp and mow high...even as high as three or four inches! Don’t mow during the hottest time of the day. This will cause less stress for your lawn and for you. And if your lawn is starting to go into dormancy (turning brown) delay mowing until it rains and begins to grow again. Finally and most importantly do what you can to prevent and relieve soil compaction. Plants and those all-important microbes in our soil need AIR. Our activity on the surface smashes the soil and decreases all of the positive things we want to see on the surface. Less compacted soil captures more water when it rains

which is good for our plants. Absorbing rain where it falls is great for our environment in general. Compacted soil causes even shallower root systems which makes our lawns even less drought tolerant. Soil compaction occurs most easily during wet soil conditions but how many of us avoid mowing during those times? Plus, many of us use heavy riding mowers these days which compounds the problem. Consider aerating and by the way, fall is the best time for seeding a lawn too. Encouraging your grass to be as healthy and thick as possible is the best natural way to see less of the stuff that you don't want to see!

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