

Box Elder Bugs & Snow Mold

Recent temperatures have been slightly warmer, causing snow to melt. With this, a disease called snow mold is again appearing in many lawns. There are two fungi that cause the disease, and they are differentiated by the color of the fungus which is either pink or gray. They are both active during cool weather, especially under snow when the ground is not completely frozen, and cause similar damage. Affected areas in the lawn often have a light grayish-brown color and turf that is matted down.

Chemical control of the disease is usually not necessary. It is important to rake impacted areas to remove dead grass blades and increase aeration. This will speed turf recovery. In severe cases, the turf may need to be completely removed and replaced. Snow mold is especially common in shady areas and where snow is piled from shoveling. The disease is additionally made worse if leaf litter was not removed from the lawn. In these areas, exchanging turf for landscape beds may be necessary. For more information, see the fact sheet entitled *Snow Mold on Turfgrass* at: <http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/snow-mold08.pdf>.

Warmer weather has also brought on reemergence of Box Elder bugs. These are the black and orange insects that are especially noticed in the fall on the south side of various buildings and can be found indoors during the winter. These bugs primarily feed on seed produced by female box elder trees and overwinter to lay eggs in the spring. Indoors, the simplest way to control the bugs is with a wet-dry vacuum. Water can be placed in the bottom of the vacuum containing a small amount of liquid soap. After placing the mix in the vacuum, suck up the bugs and wait a few minutes for them to drown. Smashing Box Elder bugs may cause a foul odor to be emitted and can leave stains.

Outdoors, bugs can be additionally difficult to control since they overwinter in leaf litter and debris. If litter and debris are removed from the yard, bug populations can be reduced. Another method of outdoor control recommended by the Utah Pest Lab is to spray bugs directly with a mixture of 1 gallon of water to ½ cup of laundry detergent. This spray must come into contact with the bugs and has no residual effect. In severe situations, bugs may need to be controlled with pesticides. Because the species is highly mobile, permanent control is not possible and repeat treatment may be needed. This means that if most of the bugs are killed in a particular area, more will usually migrate in within a few days. Before using sprays or pesticides on a broader scale, use a small amount on the area to be sprayed at least 24 hours in advance to determine if there are any unintended, harmful effects. Properly following pesticide labels is a federal law and minimizes risk to the user. For more information on Box Elder bugs, visit <http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/factsheet/boxelder-bugs06.pdf>.