

Soil Fungi

Recently I have observed a great number of mushrooms and toadstools present in landscapes. The mushrooms and toadstools are structures produced by various fungi for the purpose of spreading spores. These spores can be compared to very small plant seeds that have the potential to produce a new fungal organism in a different location. Many times fungi living in the soil produce these during cool, wet weather so that it is easier for spores to travel farther in the wind and rain to get established in a new location.

Many people often ask what they should do if they get them in the lawn and flower beds. The simplest thing is to remove them with a shovel and throw them away. Wear gloves when doing so. Fungicides are often ineffective because the mushroom or toadstool is just a small portion of an organism living much deeper in the soil. It is very difficult for fungicides to reach deep enough to eliminate the fungi.

Another question that is often asked is if the mushrooms or toadstools are toxic. It can be hard to tell for sure and is best not to eat them unless you have had specific training on identification from a trained expert and lots of practice. Over the years, many people have been harmed or killed because of mushroom misidentification. If a pet or person does eat an unidentified type of mushroom, it is best to get them to the doctor or veterinarian along with the type of mushroom or toadstool so an accurate identification can be made.

Soil fungi that produce mushrooms and toadstools feed on organic matter in the soil. This could include lawn thatch, roots from dead plants and trees, organic compost and even old construction waste. This is usually beneficial because the organic matter they decompose improves the soil. However, if toadstools or mushrooms are a continual problem, some methods to reduce their numbers include avoiding over-watering, removing excessive organic matter with aeration, dethatching (only when absolutely necessary) and removing old roots and construction waste. With warm, dry weather, toadstools and mushrooms often go away on their own.

Another soil fungal problem that has been common this spring is a condition called fairy ring. These are rings of fungi that are visible in a lawn. Often times the grass dies in a portion of the rings because the fungus causes the soil to become temporarily compacted, preventing water from entering in. In other portions, the grass turns darker green and grows at a faster rate than the rest of the lawn. Fairy rings will usually disappear after one to five years. Additionally, they can be temporarily masked by regular fertilization and frequent aeration may also help eliminate them. For more information,

access the following web page:

http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/factsheet/pub_6022527.htm.