



Slime Moulds – A disorder of lawns and low-growing plants

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During autumn and spring, yellow, grey or brown masses of slimy, frothy, or powdery material may suddenly appear on lawns, mulch, and low-growing plants. The organisms responsible are types of fungi commonly called slime moulds.

Characteristics

Slime moulds appear as patches of watery or jelly-like slimy material that covers the surface of the soil, pasture, lawns, fallen leaves, or mulch on garden beds. After a few days the jelly-like material produces fruiting bodies that are commonly ash grey, though in some instances they may be bright yellow or red. These fruiting bodies usually occur in great numbers on the affected plant material and may cover an area of up to a square metre.

Life cycle

The organisms survive from one season to the next as microscopic spores that are very resistant to desiccation. These spores germinate under cool, moist conditions and give rise to a jelly-like material that creeps over the soil or surface vegetation. At maturity, the moulds move on to grass, leaves, twigs, etc. and rapidly produce the spore-bearing formations.

The spores are dispersed by wind, rain splash, animals, insects, and other agencies.

Damage to plants

Most slime moulds live on organic matter or feed on other micro organisms. The species found on lawns, shrubs and other low-growing plants are not parasitic. However, in some instances they may smother plants or cause them to look unthrifty. The moulds may also form a water-repellent crust on soil surfaces, which reduces the water available to nearby plants.

Control

In the normal course of events slime moulds will disappear on the return of hot or dry weather. They may also be brushed or hosed away. However, if they return year after year, spraying with a suitable registered fungicide may be a better control option. Consult your nursery or chemical reseller for a suitable product.

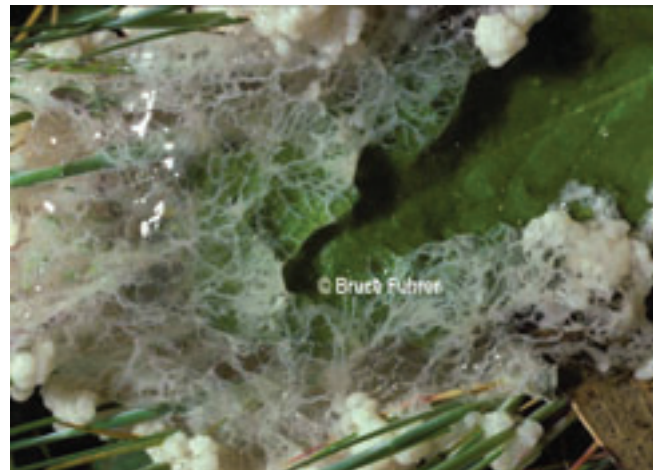


Figure 1. Plasmodial stage of slime mould (*Fuligo* sp)
Photograph courtesy of B. Fuhrer



Figure 2. Sporing stage of *Fuligo septica*
Photograph courtesy of B. Fuhrer

Spraying with a copper solution is a good method of control. However, if you need to spray over lawn areas or close to existing plants or seedlings, one of the milder copper solutions such as copper hydroxide is recommended, to prevent damage to leaves.

It is also worth bearing in mind that poor surface soil drainage can contribute to the problem, particularly on lawn areas, so aerating or spiking the surface to a depth of at least 15 cm can help.

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