



NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

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Mushrooms in Yards & Gardens

Mushrooms and related fungal structures appearing around yards can mean a variety of things. Depending on whether in lawns, on mulch, or growing on tree trunks, each presents various levels of concern.

Mushrooms in lawns are feeding off organic matter in the soil. Small numbers popping up are insignificant, other than if your dog tries to eat them, and with all the rain is quite common right now. Occasionally concentrated areas appear, often where remains of trees are buried in the soil. Fairy rings appear as arcs or semi-circles of darker green grass early in the season, oftentimes followed later by mushrooms in that same ring.

There is no quick solution to eliminating mushrooms in lawns. Sweeping away mushrooms as they appear may provide some temporary relief. Eliminating fairy rings gets more involved as lifting sod and removing the buried food source is necessary. To be effective, this includes removing old tree wood and root systems, along with soil immediately around it. Often this is not practical. Eventually if nothing is done the food source will be depleted.

Mushroom-like growth on bark mulch, often described to look like vomit (sorry if you are eating as you read this), are slime molds. They often grow on newer mulch and although unsightly are harmless. Raking the mulch to expose more of it to air and sunlight will help reduce slime mold growth.

Mushrooms and shelf fungi growing out of tree trunks present the most concern. This is serious because it indicates internal trunk decay. The center wood is dead tissue and functions to support trees as they grow taller and wider. Extensive wood rot decay compromises wood strength, creating potentially hazardous situations. Trees often become hollow, yet still have foliage and appear healthy since the vital transport system just under the bark is still intact.

Wood rot can get started when limbs break away from trunks and leaves jagged wounds, either from storms, wind, or poor pruning practices. Damage to roots underground from digging or construction activity near trees is another cause. All these scenarios allow fungi to enter and begin to develop inside trees. Fungal fruiting bodies, visible as shelf fungi or mushrooms, appear on trunks. Removing visible structures will not stop the decay occurring inside.

Prevent decay by avoiding wounds and pruning carefully. Use extreme caution when digging or working near trees to protect trunks and root systems. If decay exists on a tree near your home, consult a licensed arborist to assess the potential hazard the tree presents.

Interested in learning more about Horticulture in Iron County?
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