

Mushrooms in Lawns

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson

After extended periods of high rainfall and warm temperatures, mushrooms can seemingly appear in lawns overnight. While such lawns can look like clusters of spaceships from Mars have taken up residence, mushrooms generally are not harmful to lawn growth.

Question: White mushrooms quickly appeared in my lawn and in many other lawns in my neighborhood. My lawn looks like a cluster of spaceships from Mars has taken up residence! Where do the mushrooms come from and is there anything to control them? Are they edible?

Answer: Late summer

seems to be mushroom season on the Gulf Coast. Adequate soil moisture, warm soils, and slightly cooler air temperatures appear to set off mushroom growth.

Unlike poisonous spiders or snakes, which often have distinct markings or bright colors to warn

of the danger, poisonous mushrooms can be pretty vanilla in appearance. Some lawn mushrooms are edible and some are toxic.

Unless you are a mushroom expert and can specifically identify the mushroom, the best rule to follow is: "Never eat mushrooms that grow in



September 12, 2018



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News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.



your lawn.” Children should be given this message very clearly and, to this day, I have followed this advice as well.

Mushroom poisoning can vary from a minor upset stomach to a rather painful protracted death. The abundance of mushrooms in many area lawns provides a greater opportunity for small children to come in contact with them. Remove mushrooms as they appear to reduce the temptation they can offer to children.

Mushrooms have become very common in many lawns since the occurrence of multiple rounds of rainfall over the past couple of weeks. They belong to a group of organisms called fungi. Mushrooms are the reproductive portion of the fungi and the vegetative portion (known as hyphae) grows belowground.

Since mushrooms lack chlorophyll that is found in green plants, they must derive their food from decaying plants. They will grow on decaying underground roots, bark, and other sources of organic matter found beneath the soil. They are often found in areas that had trees removed some years back.

Some types of mushrooms grow in a distinctive circular-to-elliptical pattern known as a "fairy ring." Most mushrooms encountered in lawns occur in a random pattern and are close relatives of "fairy ring" mushrooms.

When we have periods of high rainfall and warm temperatures, mushrooms can appear virtually overnight. Save your money—there is nothing you can do to prevent this. Frequent mowing will do more good than anything else.

Question: One of my trees was recently struck by lightning. Is there anything I can do to save the tree or is it likely to die?

Answer: A lightning strike to a tree in one's landscape is a traumatic experience for both the tree and its caretaker. After checking to see if one's own limbs are intact, attention quickly shifts to the welfare of the tree.

The morning after an electrical storm, local Extension offices often field questions from concerned homeowners regarding the prognosis for beloved trees and what care might be given to help them survive or recover. Unfortunately and quite accurately for the concerned tree steward, the best answer to these urgent questions is often, "time will tell."

A lightning strike can affect a tree in many ways. Some are immediately obvious and some are not. Sometimes the trunk and/or large branches are splintered. A strike may make continuous grooves in the trunk or main branches. In many cases, the apparent damage may appear minimal while internal injury to the vascular tissues of the trunk and roots is extensive and gradually manifests itself over a

period of months or even years.

In some cases, the majority of the damage occurs to the main roots of a tree as the electrical discharge (up to 100 million volts at thousands of amperes) vaporizes the water inside the roots, creating superheated steam.

It is difficult to predict which trees will be struck by lightning and which are most likely to be seriously injured. In general, lone trees, those tallest in a group or those growing in moist soil have the highest probability of being struck.

Should one apply any of the various wound dressing concoctions commonly used? While most wound dressing concoctions do no harm to the tree, many dressings develop cracks over time that can harbor insects or hold water that lead to decay. Applying a wound dressing may make the caretaker performing the operation feel better, but it is not recommended.

If the lightning damage has created hazardous broken branches, these should be taken care of quickly by an experienced arborist. My experience has been that a lightning strike does not automatically spell doom to a tree as many such trees are able to make a remarkable recovery given adequate care and time.

