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Writer: Tony Melton, County Agent
Florence County

A Fungus Among Us

Very large, showy mushrooms, not quite as large as the ones in Alice In Wonderland, are springing up in many yards, including my own yard. Mushrooms are the above-ground fruiting bodies of fungi that live in the soil. These fungi feed on decaying organic matter, such as old roots, stumps, dog poop, mulch, and thatch. When these fungi have a source of food they will be present in your lawn and glorify their presence as toadstools, mushrooms or puffballs of various shapes and sizes. From mid-summer to the fall when the weather is wet, they will seem to sprout up overnight and stick out like the old saying “the devil’s doorknob.”

Many people hate the presence of mushrooms in their yard and vow to keep their stays short. Continual removal of mushrooms can be a never-ending task. I enjoy the old place-kicking technique of removal since my football playing days have long past. However, many people call me seeking a more permanent removal technique. The only permanent removal technique is the removal or exhaustion of their food source. Folks all around the area have stumps ground when trees are removed. These old stumps and roots are an excellent source of food for fungi and many times develop into fairy rings.

Most mushrooms do not damage the lawn, but some develop into fairy rings which can kill your grass. Fairy rings are areas of dark green, dead, or dying grass that are circular or arc-shaped. These circles can range in size from one foot to as large as several hundred feet in diameter. Usually, the grass in the center of the fairy ring is dead and surrounded with a border of dark green grass with mushrooms growing in it. The reason the grass dies is that the fairy ring fungus mycelia (roots) make the soil repel water. The grass dies from drought. Again the only way to permanently get rid of a fairy ring is the removal or exhaustion of the food source. I have talked to many people who have had their stumps ground but not be able to grow grass because of fairy rings. To grow grass they finally had to have a backhoe totally remove the stumps; thus, removing the food source for the fairy ring.

To learn the specifics on gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby St. You may also visit our Home & Garden Information Center through our web site at www.clemson.edu/florence. I may be contacted through our web site, amelton@clermson.edu, or 661-4800.

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