

News Column for Use Week of 8/16/2021  
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## **Slime Molds in the Lawn and Landscape**

After some of the heavier rains we had this spring and summer, gardeners may have been startled to find amorphous clumps of slime covering their bark mulch, lawn, or small garden plants. These fungus look-alikes are ancient organisms called slime molds.

Despite mold being in their name, slime molds are not true fungi, but rather members of a shape-shifting group of organisms called myxomycetes. Slime molds are more closely related to amoebas and certain seaweeds and come in many shapes, colors, and sizes.

Unlike stationary mushrooms that excrete enzymes to break down and absorb their food, slime molds have fluid cell membranes and move around to find sustenance. Slime molds grow and thrive in wet conditions and, although slime mold does not have a brain, it is capable of moving in the direction of food, which mainly consists of bacteria, fungal spores, and dead organic matter.

Slime molds often attract attention because of their bright colors and disgusting appearance, particularly on mulch. They may be white, yellow, orange, or red. Common names are often quite descriptive. For example, the "dog vomit" slime mold is a bright, whitish color that resembles its namesake. There is also the "scrambled egg" slime mold, "the yellow blob" slime mold, and the "regurgitated cat breakfast" slime mold. Other slime molds resemble a network of veins or a fan. Slime molds can appear like slime or ooze when wet. When they dry out, they are more crusty or puffy, and if you bump or kick them you might send up a plume of dusty spores.

In your lawn, they may appear as gray or purplish patches or smears. Upon closer inspection, you will see large numbers of small gray, white or purple fruiting structures, called sporangia on leaf blades. Affected areas are often several inches to 1 foot in diameter.

Homeowners often are concerned that this is a disease organism and will kill the grass, but it simply uses the turf as a structure on which to grow. In some instances, however, heavy patches of slime mold can damage turf by completely covering leaf blades and interfering with photosynthesis.

As soon as changes in moisture, temperature, or exhaustion of its food supply lead to unfavorable growing conditions, they form spore-producing structures for reproduction. Spores move in the wind or on animals to colonize new areas during the next spell of wet weather. As the structures dry out in hot weather, they become ash gray and break up easily when touched.

Though they may look alarming, slime molds are largely harmless in the landscape. They will frequently grow on plants but do not feed on them. They are not plant pathogens, and they do not damage plants.

The presence of a slime mold only requires intervention if you find its appearance highly disagreeable. Slime molds will disappear on their own when the weather changes, but if you cannot wait, slime molds can be physically broken apart with a rake, broom, mower, or hose. Simply use a shovel to discard the offensive organism from the mulch and then stir up the mulch for aeration. Chemical control of slime molds with fungicides is both unnecessary and ineffective.

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