SLIME MOLD CRUST *on Your Turfgrass*

Homeowners and turf managers are often distressed by the appearance of a turf pest organism generally known as slime mold. The observed symptoms appear as a crusty or powdery coating of upper turf foliage. This dusty coating may look ashy-gray, purple, brown or charcoal-gray. It may be an encrusted cover but is usually a powdery buildup that wipes off easily. Symptoms may last from several days to more than a week.

Slime molds are harmless, primitive fungi of the Myxomycetes. There are five genera and about 100 species that form slime molds, but only Physarum, Fuligo and Mucilago genera are commonly found in Louisiana. Some unusual species like the northern 'Dog Vomit Slime Mold' (http://botit.botany.wisc.edu/toms_fungi/june99.html) are interesting to find.

Slime mold organism's fruiting (sporangiam) stage.

LIFE CYCLE

Most of slime mold's life cycle is spent unseen. When well fed from consuming soil microbes, fungi and organic matter, the small swarm spores clump together if conditions are overcast, warm and quite wet for extended periods. This slimy clump becomes a large amoeba-like organism known as the plasmodium stage. The greasy-looking plasmodium may be mostly clear or take on one of many colors. It creeps upward on grass leaves, low-growing plant materials and ground covers to support itself up off the ground for better spore dispersal.

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The plasmodium further bunches up and develops into a fruiting or sporangium stage. This stage is the most visible and is the stage commonly noticed in lawns. As conditions dry, this sporangium dries to that crusty or dusty 'crud' on your grass. The sporangium stage may be powdery, ashy-gray to purple, brown or, the most common: charcoal-gray. Some species may be tan or orange like the Dog Vomit. In this elevated stage, the mature spores are released for dispersal by wind, rain or other vectors. Slime molds tend to reappear in the same general areas when conditions are again favorable.

DAMAGE

Since slime molds are not parasitic, there is little or no damage to their supporting hosts. If the infestation is heavy and long in duration (a week or so), the underlying foliage can yellow from its shading effect. This can make the supporting host grass weak and possibly lead to secondary disease infection. Affected areas may be from several inches to a couple of feet in irregular patches. The black powdery spores are a nuisance, however. Aside from being unsightly, spores may stain clothing or pets.

CONTROL

Control measures are often not needed. If grass is actively growing, it can be mowed off with the clippings. Since slime molds feed on thatch, avoid thatch buildup or dethatch the sod and improve area drainage. With the onset of dry weather, it can be hosed off the foliage or brushed off. Hosing or brushing during wet periods usually just spreads the slime mold to new areas. If infestations are heavy and chemical control is desired, a manzate type of fungicide is recommended. Follow label directions, use plenty of spray volume (2 to 3 gallons per 1,000 sq.ft.) and water the product down into the thatch.

Thomas J. Koske, Ph.D, Professor of Horticulture

Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
William B. Richardson, Chancellor
Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station
William H. Brown, Vice Chancellor and Director
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service
Paul D. Coreil, Vice Chancellor and Director
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