

# ASK A MASTER GARDENER

## DOG VOMIT SLIME MOLD



**Linda Estep**  
Master Gardener

**Question:** About a month ago, right before the weather became chilly, I noticed this weird growth in my mulched areas. The best way to describe it is a yellow foamy mass. My first thought was that an animal got sick in my yard, but as the mass increased in size each day, I came to the conclusion that was not the case. After awhile, it turned brown and dried up naturally. What is this weird looking stuff?

**Answer:** You have described *Fuligo septica*, also known as dog vomit slime mold. It is sometimes called scrambled egg slime mold. No matter what you want to call it, the sudden appearance of it in your yard is startling and somewhat gross.

Like all slime molds, it is unrelated to fungi. It is classified in the Kingdom Protista (the Protists). There are 900 species of slime molds and this one grows worldwide under the right conditions.

It begins as a bright yellow, gelatinous growth, but fades to a sickly orange brown as it matures. The end result is a powdery brown pile that will erupt in a wisp of spores being released when it is disturbed.

Some have described its appearance as looking like that expanding foam used to fill cracks and gaps in walls around the house. It has no definite shape and will appear as a small irregular mound less than an inch in height and anywhere from around an inch to over a foot in diameter.

If you are in the habit of checking your garden areas every morning, you will notice that it literally appears overnight. It can grow on lawns (especially if there is a lot of thatch), mulched areas, compost piles, bare soil, tree stumps and old logs. It basically feeds on any decaying plant matter.

Moist compost and wood chips create an ideal condition for this mold to thrive and grow very fast. It feeds on the bacteria on the mulch and doesn't actually eat the mulch directly. It feeds on fresh mulch more so than older mulch.

When it is warm and wet enough, the spores absorb moisture and crack open to release cells that fuse into a plasmodium, a mass or protoplasm



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containing multiple cell nuclei that aren't separated by cell walls. The plasmodium acts like a large amoeba, absorbing the food source and then breaking it down.

In its first stage, it creeps over dead wood and other materials, moving about a millimeter per hour. When it is ready to reproduce, it makes spores that blow away to start new plasmodia somewhere else.

These wind-borne spores can remain viable for years, just waiting for perfect conditions to start growing again. It can occur anytime from late spring through fall and needs moisture to thrive.

So, what should you do about it? Nothing. It is considered a nuisance, not a disease. The good news is that it does not harm plants, people or animals. It is actually beneficial and an important component of the soil ecosystem. Studies have shown that it can accumulate heavy metals from the soil and turn them into inactive forms.

It will typically disappear in a few days in dry conditions. However, if you just can't stand it being in your yard, there are a few things you could do to control it.

One way is to use a rake to spread it out. Exposing it to air will help dry it out before the spores are reproduced. You could also use a shovel or



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pitchfork to remove the mass. If you choose to proceed using either one of these methods, make sure the mass is still in the slimy stage.

If disturbed when it is crusty and a light brown, the spores will puff up like dust and be distributed by the wind. Spraying it with water at this point will also increase the spreading of the spores. Now you have just made the matter worse!

While this is a temporary and unpleasant occurrence in your yard, please remember that dog vomit slime mold is a decomposer just doing its job, rotting natural organic

material and breaking it down into its basic chemical form.

It is just a temporary cosmetic problem – a temporary clump of yuckiness. Dog vomit slime mold is one of nature's interesting oddities.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*