

Mushrooms, a sign of health

Question: I'm noticing mushrooms sprouting up all over my lawn recently. Is this a bad thing? Should I be alarmed?

The presence of mushrooms in your lawn and/or garden are actually an indicator of a healthy soil. When environmental conditions are just right, such as a rainy period and plenty of organic matter is found in the soil, mushrooms will pop up seemingly out of nowhere. The mushroom itself is simply the fruiting body of the fungi that live in the soil. If you scrape off the mushroom, the fungi underground will remain under the soil surface, ready to put forth new mushroom fruiting bodies again the following year.

The vast majority of fungi are beneficial, especially saprophytic fungi like mushrooms which feed on dead organic matter, turning it into rich compost. The thread-like hyphae of the fungi attach themselves to plant roots, forming a symbiotic relationship of mycorrhizae.

These mycorrhizal filaments produce organic compounds that glue



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soils together improving soil structure and porosity which enhances root growth. They also suppress soil-borne pathogens, thus protecting plants from root disease. Mycorrhizal filaments of the fungi reach far into the soil, thus increasing the surface area of the plant's roots up to a thousand times. Often you can visually see these white thread-like structures when you turn over decaying leaves or mulch.

Plants rely on soil fungi along with bacteria to digest nutrients for them. They in turn feed soil organisms with the sugars they make through the process of photosynthesis. These soil organisms decompose organic matter. Without them, lawn clippings and dead leaves would accumulate and choke out the grass.

Most mushrooms do no damage to your lawn or garden, but some people find them unsightly.

Be warned that some mushrooms may also be poisonous. So if you are worried about your small children or pets picking them and eating them, it might be best to remove them by raking over them, mowing them or picking them by hand and burying them in your compost pile. Removing the mushroom fruiting body will reduce the number of spores released into the environment and thus decrease the number of new mushrooms sprouting up. Never eat an unknown mushroom unless you are skilled in identifying them.

Using a fungicide chemical to control mushrooms is quite ineffective because the fungus mycelium may be several feet below the surface of the soil.

So it's best to either ignore them, rake them off or admire them for the amazing underground powerhouses they are.

Do you have a gardening question? Email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg.