

Mushrooms are common during wet weather

The sudden appearance of mushrooms is common in Northwest Florida landscapes. They can pop up overnight during rainy periods.

In today's article, Dan Mullins, UF/IFAS Extension Agent in Santa Rosa County, and I provide information on these mostly beneficial fungi.

Most of the mushrooms in question are the reproductive structures of saprophytic fungi. This group of fungi is an important part of the complex natural system that breaks down dead plant and animal parts into more simple compounds.

Imagine if dead plants and animals didn't decompose and add organic matter back to the soil. If it were not for these decomposers, we would be deep in dead stuff!

Most of the time the saprophytic fungi go quietly about their business but they can sometimes cause alarm among gardeners and homeowners. When environmental conditions are just right, they go into a reproductive stage forming mushrooms, puffballs and similar structures of different sizes and colors.

One such species produces orange mushrooms with the odor of rotting meat. Known as stinkhorn, this fungus helps breakdown dead wood. In landscape plantings, it most commonly occurs in beds where wood mulch has been used.

The fairy ring fungus is so named because it forms white mushrooms in a perfect circle. This saprophyte begins at a single point, such as on a buried piece of wood or stump. Once that is decomposed it begins moving outward feeding upon dead grass roots, thatch, clippings and other organic materials. Most of the fungus remains underground in small strands known as hyphae and might not form mushrooms for many years. When conditions for mushroom development occur, the mushrooms appear all at the same time. In most cases fairy rings are only a few feet in diameter but there are cases where they are known to be many miles across.

Another group of saprophytic fungi are the slime molds. There are slimy ones and those species that have the consistency of egg whites. Some can move by a flowing motion. They are commonly found growing on the surface of dead wood, mulch and in extremely warm, wet areas of lawns. They may be gray, yellow, white or other colors.

During rainy periods, it's common to see mushrooms of various sizes and shapes. With only a few exceptions, they do not cause diseases of landscape plants. Some are poisonous if ingested. There is no environmentally safe fungicide that can be recommended for control. Gardeners should accept and appreciate this special group of fungi. In cases where the mushrooms are objectionable they can be removed, mowed down or golfers can use them for practicing tee shots.

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