Leaflets News and Information for the Arborists of Michigan

The Plant Doctor's LANDSCAPE TIPS

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STINKIN' NUISANCE FUNGI

Photo 1: Stinkhorn fungi receive their names from their objectionable odors and shape. Some actually belong to the scientific classification genus name *Phallus*, an adequate description of their shape.

Photo 2: A close up of a bird's nest fungus, growing on a decaying piece of wood. The nests are small, measuring about one-quarter inch across.

Photo 3: Slime molds such as Fuligo, are quite common in hardwood chip mulch. They may grow to a very large size and in this case may resemble its common name, "dog barf."

INTRODUCTION:

A variety of fungi are considered nuisance problems in landscape situations. These fungi may take many different forms and characteristics. Most cause no serious harm but many are objectionable to landscape owners. The objectionable aspects of these "all–natural" organisms are usually attributed to their reproductive structures. Although there are potentially thousands and thousands of potential objectionable fungi that may inhabit our landscapes, following are just a few examples of the more common nuisance fungi.

EXAMPLES OF NUISANCE FUNGI:

Stinkhorns: One of the more objectionable fungi in the landscape comprises a large class of fungi known as stinkhorns. Some of the more common ones have scientific names such as *Mutinous* and *Phallus* (Photo 1). They derive their names from their shape and the fact that most species are odiferous, and not in a friendly perfumery manner either. Some also produce rather large "stalks" and resemble their namesake, *Phallus*. Imagine hosting a barbeque dinner for friends or coworkers and having highly disagreeable odors wafting across the landscape.

Bird's Nest: This class of nuisance fungi receives their name from the simple fact that they resemble bird's nests (Photo 2). These nests are actually reproductive structures designed for spore release and dispersal. As spores are released, they may stick to surfaces as the military fungi do (discussed below). Similar to other nuisance organisms, bird's nest fungi use mulch or other decomposing material as a substrate and/or surface in which to complete their natural obligations, namely promotion of the species.

Artillery, Cannonball, and Shotgun: There are some rather unique fungi that have received the common names of artillery, cannonball and shotgun fungi; some fungal names include *Sphaerobolus* and *Pilobolus*. As their name implies, these fungi actually shoot or eject ordnance, uh spores, forcefully and in some cases for great distances. Although we may not normally see their reproductive structures on their 4th of July celebrations, we can often witness the effect, which is the "plastering" of house siding, automobiles, lawn furniture, etc. with numerous tiny reddish-black spores. These spores are sticky and virtually impossible to remove; the stain that the spores leave on these surfaces can often be impossible to remove.

Slime Molds: There are numerous types of organisms that were originally classified as fungi or molds, but which are now considered to be quite unrelated to fungi. Many are single celled while others form a rather large aggregate of nuclei in a mobile cytoplasm (amoeba). Slime molds grow in all sorts of shapes, sizes, colors and textures (Photo 3). Many are associated with landscape mulches; others may grow directly on landscape plants or on turf, using them as a surface on which to complete their life cycle.

GUN CONTROL:

Managing nuisance fungi can be perplexing and difficult, on par with the antics pursued by the Gopher Patrol Authority (Bill Murray) in the movie Caddyshack. As objectionable as some are, nuisance fungi pose no harm to people or their landscapes. Most are simply doing their "natural thing" and will disappear with a little time. Hence, doing nothing may be the best option.

Other options for managing nuisance fungi may also be considered. Many of the nuisance fungi prefer fresh hardwood chips mulch. Using mulch with a higher bark concentration may help to reduce slime molds and other bothersome fungi. Many of the landscapes afflicted with nuisance fungi also tend to receive abundant irrigation. Because most of these organisms require abundant moisture, reducing the irrigation amount and frequency will likely reduce the occurrence of these organisms. The use of dangerous and harsh chemicals is generally not recommended; even though chemicals may kill the organisms, collateral damage to landscape plants and potential harm to children and pets preclude the recommendation of chemical use in most situations. Perhaps the easiest and least offensive procedure is to simply remove the objectionable entities and toss them out with the trash!

For more information, please feel free to email me at robertsd@msu.edu or contact a professional plant health care provider. The author, MSU or MGIA do not endorse any particular products. If using pesticides, be sure to read and follow label directions.