The Plant Doctor's LANDSCAPE TIPS

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SLIME MOLDS: ALIENS FROM OUTER SPACE?

INTRODUCTION:

You've been away on business for several days and you're anxious to get home to visit with the family. You're also eager to check out your garden and landscape where your plant hobby truly soothes and relaxes you after long hours at your high pressure job. You and your spouse invested significant funds in your landscape and lawn over the past several years and your investment must be the envy of the neighborhood! As you turn onto your street, you can already visualize many new colors and textures not present several days ago when you left. You feel proud. With a smile, you make the final maneuver into your drive when…Oh my gawd! What are all those ugly looking blobs of goo scattered all over my landscape?!?! Oh the Horror!! Several things immediately pass through your mind. Has your landscape suddenly been invaded by weird beings from Outer Space? Did your teenagers have a wild party at your house? What will the interior look like? Is your landscaper responsible? What will the neighbors think?

SLIME MOLDS: WHAT ARE THEY?

Slime molds are organisms previously thought to be related to fungi. For those individuals interested in science, slime molds have recently been reclassified in Protista by some authorities. Slime molds are typically single-celled and hence, microscopic, in nature. When favorable conditions occur, for example when temperatures and moisture conditions are conducive, and along with other stimuli, the single-celled organisms congregate and multiply to produce visible and often large reproductive structures that measure one or two feet or more in diameter. While congregating and multiplying, they may move in amoeba-like fashion. These reproductive structures may appear in a large variety of colors, sizes and textures (Photo 1-4).

One of the most common slime molds in landscapes is known as *Fuligo septica* (Photo 1), sometimes commonly called "dog vomit." This particular cellular slime mold tends to inhabit newly installed hardwood bark mulch. Occasionally, the slime mold may appear to grow on plants (Photo 2) and, perhaps, even smother small ornamentals. As with other slime molds, *Fuligo* initially appears "slimy" but eventually dries and darkens into a powdery mass of spores (Photo 4), which dissipate and disappear over time.

How does one determine whether that goo in your landscape is a slime mold or remnants of a wild party? Simply stick your finger into the goo and wiggle it around. If the goo moves on its own, it is most likely a slime mold!

SLIME MANAGEMENT:

Because Slime molds are completely harmless, no control is necessary or justified; they will disappear with time (Photo 4). Slime molds pose no threat to plants, pets or people; they are all-natural, "organic" organisms common in nature. Their presence may even signify a very healthy environment. Slime molds are usually favored by very moist conditions so better management of minimal irrigation may be beneficial. Because slime molds may be viewed as ugly and unacceptable in some landscapes, simple physical removal and disposal may be an option. On mulch, simply scoop up the mass and place in the garbage or in a less conspicuous site. A strong jet of water can be used to wash the "slime" from plants. Please do not use chemicals to kill slime molds; chemicals may harm nearby plants and pets and children who may come into contact with the chemical.

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.

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Photo 1: Typical slime mold known as *Fuligo septica*, found on mulch in many landscapes. Although disagreeable to some people, these organisms are completely harmless.

Photo 2: Some slime molds may grow on plants such as this example of Fuligo on the trunk of this arborvitae. It is doing no harm to the plant.

Photo 3: There are thousands of different slime molds, exhibiting different sizes, colors and habits. This particular one is growing on turf. Photo credit: Daniel Puleo.

Photo 4: Slime molds require no management procedures; they eventually turn brown and disappear.