RINGS OF MUSHROOMS

By Ralph E. Mitchell

Have you noticed a large number of mushrooms popping up in local yards? These fungi are sometimes known as "toadstools" and can even form circles in your lawn. Better known as "Fairy Rings", these fairly common circular manifestations are fascinating to some homeowners. Others, however, may find fairy rings a nuisance, a bother, and even an eyesore! What is the inside story on these fungi?

The first question is how do fairy rings form? Fairy rings can appear in three different forms named appropriately Type I, Type II, or Type III. Type I rings appear in the lawn as a zone of dead grass with a zone of very dark green grass just inside that ring. Type II rings have a zone of dark green grass with or without a ring of mushrooms. The final type, Type III, has no evident zones of dead grass or dark green color, but simply a circle of mushrooms. These mushrooms need dead organic matter to obtain their nutrients. Fairy ring mushrooms take advantage of organic matter such as tree stumps, lumber, leaves, etc., that has been buried or is naturally present. Such organic matter will persist for many years as the fairy ring fungi slowly breaks it down. This is very natural and beneficial in the scheme of nature. The appearance of the mushrooms signals that the fungi working below ground is reproducing and will soon release spores.

Fairy rings usually start small (one foot in diameter or less) and then enlarge each year in circular or semi-circular patterns six feet or more across. Fairy rings will hang around as long as the food supply and warm, rainy weather persists - usually about five years. The intense green ring of grass that forms can be masked with good fertilizer practices that equal out the color difference. Consider these mushrooms poisonous and carefully remove and destroy them so that they are not accidentally ingested by humans or pets. Proper regular mowing will also assist in suppressing mushroom rings by chopping them up. Some fairy ring fungi actually have the ability to cause areas in the ring to repel water thus developing a drought-like, dead area under a ring of grass. To reverse this condition, break up the soil in this area and, using a wetting agent, water the ring until the soil returns to normal. While chemical controls are available, they only suppress the fungi and do nothing to remove the dark green rings or rewet the soil.

When you see circles of mushrooms, don't fret! They will eventually go away by themselves. Enjoy the phenomenon and keep in mind that there is no long-term damage to your lawn. For more information on all types of lawn issues, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** 10:00am-1:00pm every Thursday.
- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) every Thursday 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** 1st Saturday of month.
- **Peachland Promenades Publix** - 2nd Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** - 3rd Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Resource:

Elliot, M. L. & Simone, G. W. (2001) Fairy Rings, The University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service, IFAS.