



**Box 1676
Camrose, AB
T4V 1X6
(780) 678 6450
sales@scottsqualitylawncare.ca
scottsqualitylawncare.ca**

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COMMON LAWN FUNGAL DISEASES_FAIRY RING

A great deal of Western European folklore and myth surrounds fairy rings. People once believed that the circle or ring of mushrooms appeared where fairies or elves had danced the night before.

However, nowadays, a fairy ring is the common term used to describe a fungal disease characterized by rings of mushrooms and/or puffballs, in combination with lush green arcs, or circular bands or rings with greener grass in their midst. Or... it could be arcs or rings or patches of necrotic or dead vegetation in established lawns, too.

There are some variations but there are normally 4 main types of fairy rings, depending upon the specific fungus at work in your lawn and the stage of its growth.

As you'll see below some will cause grass to grow more abundantly and luxuriously. Others will cause the grass to wither, dry out, and die.

Type 1 - One of the most common types is a large arc or ring of dark-green grass, with no mushrooms.



Type 2 - Contains an arc or ring of mushrooms with stimulated, actively growing dark green grass.



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Type 3 - Contains only an arc or ring of mushrooms with no evidence of unusual grass growth.



Type 4 - Occasionally a fairy ring will produce a brown ring or arc of necrotic or dead grass.



Fairy Rings can be a common problem in residential lawns.

Firstly, let it be said that an abundance of mushrooms or puffballs suddenly appearing on your lawn doesn't necessarily signify fairies dancing on your lawn, nor fairy rings establishing themselves. In dryer years, the fungus simply waits under the soil for enough rain to fall... And then during periods of subsequent rain, it can make itself known, causing mushrooms or puffballs to start sprouting up all over your lawn. The good news is that most of these won't harm your grass and will disappear as moisture levels fall or return back to normal. Nonetheless, you should remove any mushrooms and puffballs as often as they appear as their only goal in life is to spread countless spores into the air seeking to build new underground mycelial infrastructure once they land and make a new home.

In fact, these mushrooms may not have anything to do with fairy rings at all. However, when you do have fairy rings, they often are, as shown above in 2 of the 4 types, surrounded by mushrooms.

The symptoms of fairy rings can be seen at any time of the year, but they often spring up during periods of hot and dry weather.

This typically happens in unhealthy and improperly managed turf that has been cut very low regularly, and is not being periodically fed with enough fertilizer. It's also during hot and dry weather that the grass may therefore not be getting enough water or is being watered improperly. Less frequent waterings but much deeper waterings is key. Ironically, if your dry weather suddenly changes to many consecutive days of rain before returning back to dryer conditions you may suddenly see mushrooms rising up as they're sometimes a precursor indicating that a fairy ring may be in-progress.

The mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of this fungus. This fungal growth feeds on organic matter in the thatch layer of grass as it moves throughout the soil and ends up releasing nutrients, especially nitrogen, on your lawn. As a result, one type of commonly occurring fairy ring may appear in the form of lush dark green grass growing in arcs or a circular pattern. Mushrooms and/or puffballs may also grow around that circular band as a result of the fungal growth. However, the appearance of mushrooms or puffballs may not always be the precursor. Instead, as the fungus progresses, a layer of white mycelia or a band of dry, brown-orange or yellowish material may present itself in the thatch or soil layers. It grows rapidly sending many fungal strands outward, decomposing organic matter in its path.

The size of a fairy ring often ranges from several inches long to several feet in diameter. It's not at all uncommon to find large rings reaching 10 feet or more in diameter. In very large turf areas such as large acreage lawns, golf courses, parks and sports fields, some fairy rings have been seen to grow to 200 feet or more. They typically grow outward at a rate of ½ a foot to 2 feet per year depending upon grass, soil and weather conditions.

Fairy rings are not normally a serious or fatal disease in the sense that they will cause a major amount of damage to your lawn. It's more of an aesthetic issue which you might not want on your lawn if you want it to be lush everywhere and uniform in colour.

PREVENTION/TREATMENT OPTIONS

Unfortunately, there is not a "one-time/one application" magic control for fairy rings. But there are a few things you can do to minimize their appearance.

That being said, once the disease appears it is rather difficult to eliminate — If you catch it just as it starts to manifest itself, you have a better chance of eliminating it than when it has clearly made a home on your lawn or has already been there for a long time, as you see in the previous pictures.

PREVENTION IS KEY. The best way to prevent fairy rings and other turf diseases from re-emerging on your lawn is to implement organic practices which promote a healthy lawn ---

- ✓ **Keep your lawn well- watered and properly watered.**
- ✓ **Mow your lawn regularly and at the correct height.**
- ✓ **Aerate your lawn at least once a year** to improve overall drainage and moisture penetration as well as air exchange. If you haven't done a core aeration in a very long time, you can be sure your turf and its soil beneath, is rather compacted, and will be restricting moisture penetration to some degree.
- ✓ **Additionally, and directly tied in with aeration, power-rake your lawn, too,** to remove excess thatch that is the primary food source for this fungus. It's this matted thatch on top of compacted soil that prevents enough water and nutrients getting down to the grass roots.
- ✓ **Apply fertilizer in the spring that has a higher nitrogen content in its NPK ratio.** REMEMBER: Slow-growing, nitrogen-starved lawns are more susceptible to fairy rings.
- ✓ **Additionally, it can help to occasionally top-dress your grass with a humus builder such as finished compost or well-aged manure.** This will add beneficial soil microbes... A healthier lawn isn't nearly as vulnerable as a neglected, poorly maintained, poorly-fed and poorly-watered lawn.
- ✓ **If you catch the fairy ring when it is small you may get control by digging out the soil.**
 - This is done by removing all the soil within the ring and extending outside the ring removing the soil as if it were an entire circle.
 - You'll want to be removing all the mycelial root structure that you find.
 - Add fresh topsoil and then the area can be seeded or sodded.

THE FUNGICIDE APPROACH -

If you've got a more serious fairy ring outbreak that's been left to grow and mature, you may need to apply fungicides to the affected areas to attempt to get rid of it.

Some retail products that are claimed to work well are Consan 20 and Physan 20. These products contain the active ingredient azoxystrobin which is effective against fairy rings. They are relatively cost-effective fungicides but they are not one-time-only treatments. Unfortunately, sourcing them within Canada may prove to be difficult. Canada tends to have more stringent regulations, safeguards, and controls, regarding the importation and usage of pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides than the U.S. does, where these are readily available and less regulated.

You're also going to need some patience as most fungicides, especially the ones made for commercial or agricultural applications, are very broad spectrum-based and not selective nor singularly designed for treating only fairy rings. Neither are any of them geared solely towards residential lawns. They're designed for treating numerous fungal diseases, and/or generally improving soil and plant or crop conditions so that they are healthier, and more resistant to fungal diseases. As such, the same can apply to lawns in varying degrees.

The reality is that most fungicides have not proven effective on their own for fairy rings. However, some of them in combination with other fungicides have garnered great success if applied properly and regularly. But they each have their own instructions, procedures and timing for applying them. They are not the "spray-once and problem-solved" kind of products. Sometimes it's using 2 or 3 in a specific application regimen throughout the year that facilitates effective results. This kind of effort may not be something the average homeowner is looking for... Everybody would prefer something you could spray once and problem solved, but that doesn't exist as yet.

The other challenge for the average residential user is that most of these commercially available products are only sold direct from the manufacturer or via their distributors to farmers or those with certified pesticide, herbicide, or fungicide applicator licenses. The quantities offered for sale are typically much larger than any homeowner would ever have need of or likely want to pay for, too.

Some fungicides may provide some measure of control of the fairy ring fungi, but it all depends upon the maturity and severity of your fairy ring problem. Such controls may need to be re-applied two or three times each summer for two or three years before you see ideal results.

It's important to realize that what may work well on one person's lawn may not garner the same results on someone else's. There are many variables which can affect their overall effectiveness. The least of which is of course, how healthy your lawn is to begin with. That's absolutely key.

As mentioned, unhealthy lawns are more vulnerable to fairy rings. It's a healthier turf that may respond better to treatments or be totally rid of the fairy rings sooner than a poorly managed and cared for lawn.

An example of this is how some all natural soil enhancer formulations that feed nutrients to your soil can so dramatically increase the healthiness of the soil under your lawn that younger, not so established fairy rings can be sometimes be totally eliminated with repeated nutrient treatments.

It can't be said enough that healthier lawns don't give much accommodation for fungal diseases of any kind... or if those lawns do encounter a disease, they recover faster than a struggling lawn will.

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We've seen them likewise displayed on numerous lawn care websites without links to the original sources, so we're honestly not sure who may be the original photographers. That being said, if anyone wants to use our SQLC photos, they may do so, too, as we're totally fine with that --- Our purpose is nothing more than wanting to educate you about such lawn diseases. We gratefully acknowledge that the following photos, no matter who took them, are some near-perfect examples of various fungal diseases. Whoever photographed them, did so at the perfect time to clearly indicate the main and most obvious symptoms of the diseases --- Our hats go off to them for a job very well done. In utilizing them, we simply wanted to give you the best possible photographic examples of what these particular lawn diseases would look like, to help you identify and know what you're dealing with.

***** SPECIAL NOTE *****

We love helping our clients have great-looking lawns! Of course, we always welcome your inquiries, but we also want to help educate you, too. So many of you have told us how much you appreciate the articles we make available to you.

If there are any questions you may have about your lawn or any challenges or problems you may occasionally encounter with your lawn, don't hesitate to give us a call. As with the above info article you've just read, we also have other highly beneficial lawn care articles, too...

Here are some we've created to support you with your lawn care efforts. They can help you identify any problems as well as offer some possible solutions for some of those occasional challenges lawns can encounter.

These info articles are not meant to be one-time definitive cures for whatever might ail your lawn. We all wish it was only that simple... But, there are no magic "spray this once and your lawn will be perfect thereafter" solutions... Unfortunately, those don't really exist, as much as we might all like them to. However, there are many things you can do to get your lawn in great shape and keep it that way. We encourage you to glean what you can from any of the following articles that may interest you. And for what you're not sure about, give us a call, let's talk about it, and we'll do what we can to help you.

You may reach us at 780-678-6450 if you'd like to receive any of these via email. It would be our pleasure to do our part to help you "make your lawn the envy of your neighbours"...

From Our "**PROACTIVE LAWN CARE**" Series Of Articles —

7 Steps To A Great Lawn

Caring For Our Lawn Over The Winter

Proactively Preparing Your Lawn For Drought Conditions

From Our "**WHAT YOU'RE NOT TOLD**" Series Of Articles —

What You're Not Told About All-Natural & Organic Lawn Care Alternatives

What You're Not Told About Bats & Their Guano

From Our "**WHY?**" Series Of Articles —

Why Is My Grass So Thin?

Why Dead Spots On My Lawn?

Why Am I Getting Mushrooms In My Lawn?

Why Are The Pine Needles Killing My Grass?

...See more on next page...

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From Our **“HOW TO GET RID OF...”** Series Of Articles —

How To Get Rid of Ants

How To Get Rid of Dew Worms

How To Get Rid of Fairy Rings

How To Get Rid of Quackgrass

How To Get Rid of Thistles

From Our **“DAMAGE BY DOGS & OTHER CRITTERS”** Series of Articles —

Fixing & Preventing Dog Spots

Damage Caused by Voles

From Our **“SEEDING LAWNS”** Series Of Articles —

Grass Seeding For New Lawns

Overseeding For Existing Lawns

From Our **“DIY”** Series Of Articles —

DIY_Alternate Ways To Remove Weeds In Gravel Areas

From Our **“COMMON LAWN FUNGAL DISEASES”** Series Of Articles —

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases (Compendium Of All Common Ones)

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_The Usual Causes

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Snow Mold

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Leaf Spot & Melting Out

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Ascochyta Turf Leaf Blight

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Brown Patch

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Summer Patch

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Pythium Blight

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Red Thread

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Rust Diseases

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Powdery Mildew

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Dollar Spot

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Fairy Ring

INFORMATION ON OUR FIVE PRIMARY LAWN CARE SERVICES —

FERTILIZER & WEED CONTROL:

Our Fertilization & Weed Control Program

Possible Reasons For Still Having Weeds

Ten Reasons Our Program is Different

ENRICH SOIL ENHANCER:

Our Enrich Soil Enhancer Program

Different Soil Types Have Different pH Levels

WEEKLY MOWING:

How The Weekly Lawn Mowing Works

Our Quality Control Program

Ten Reasons We Are Different

...See more on next page...

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CORE AERATION:

Why Aerate Your Lawn?

POWER RAKING:

Why Power-Rake Your Lawn?