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## HOW TO GET RID OF FAIRY RINGS

### THE FOLKLORE -

A great deal of folklore surrounds fairy rings. The name “fairy ring”, also known as a fairy circle, elf circle, elf ring, or pixie ring originates from Western European folklore and myth --- People once believed that the circle or ring of mushrooms appeared where fairies or elves had danced the night before.

### THE PRESENCE OF MUSHROOMS -

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, 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. 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, indeed, surrounded by mushrooms... So it's important to identify what your fungal problem actually is.



Regardless, you should remove any mushrooms and puffballs as often as they appear. Essentially, their only goal in life is to spread spores so try to pick them before they can do this. Each of the countless spores they release into the air will seek to build new underground mycelial infrastructure once they land and make a new home. When you mow your lawn, which may have these mushrooms or other fungi on it, you may want to use a bag instead of mulching your grass. Bagging your grass clippings and these shredded fungus bits will keep them and the developing spores, from further spreading throughout your lawn.

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## A FUNGAL DISEASE -

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.

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 turf that’s not growing very well, 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.

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.

Fairy rings are caused by soil-inhabiting fungi called basidiomycetes. They can affect residential and acreage lawns, golf courses, parks and sports fields, etc. This fungal growth feeds on organic matter in the thatch layer of grass as it moves throughout the soil and ends up releasing nutrients 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.

The size often ranges from several inches long to several feet in diameter. It’s not uncommon to find large rings reaching 10 feet or more in diameter. In very large turf areas 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.

As mentioned, while it is the most obvious clue that you “may” have a fairy ring developing, the appearance of mushrooms or puffballs may not always be the precursor. Instead, a layer of white mycelia or a band of dry, brown-orange or yellowish material may present itself in the thatch, mat or soil layers.

Fairy rings are not a serious 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 color.

If you encounter fairy rings on your lawn, there are ways you can tackle this lawn disease and remove it from your property. But first you have to identify that it is indeed, a fairy ring.

## IDENTIFICATION -

Before you may choose to apply any chemical fungicide products or some other approach, be sure to confirm that the disease you have on your lawn is definitely a fairy ring and not some other type of fungus.

Watch for any of the following fairy ring characteristics to help you identify them.

There are some variations but there are 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 - Another type contains an arc or ring of mushrooms with stimulated, actively growing dark green grass.**



**Type 3 - A third type 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.**



**UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS DO THEY HAPPEN?**

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A combination of the following can surely increase fairy ring severity:

1. Improper turf management
2. Minimal or improper watering
3. A lack of nitrogen, in particular
4. Low mowing heights

It's during mid-summer heat stress that fairy rings can quickly progress from types 1 or 2 lush green rings to type 4 dead rings. The dead grass is primarily caused by a lack of water being able to reach the grass roots, not by the fungus killing the grass. The fairy ring fungus fibers create such a dense thick mat that it does not allow water to penetrate down to where it needs to go. The fungus may also deplete the soil nutrients and once the soil becomes dry, the grass roots eventually die from the lack of water and poor nutrient assimilation, even though you may be watering your lawn regularly, but it's not getting to the roots.

## **SO... HOW DO YOU GET RID OF THEM?**

**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.

## **THE FUNGICIDE APPROACH -**

Once you have observed where fairy rings are developing, you will need to apply fungicides to the affected areas as soon as possible.

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.

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.

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As to lawn care companies getting access to the such products and then offering it to their clients, it makes perfect sense. We're currently talking to some manufacturers about this. However, the issue that arises is one of scale, and by that I mean, what quantity might be required for the typical residential lawn is far, far less than that required for an agricultural application. Most lawn care companies don't have a lot of clients encountering fairy rings. As such, the cost to bring in such larger quantities of fungicide(s) (as smaller ones are not offered) to service so few clients, is just not cost-effective. The typical lawn care company would need substantially more clients having this fungal problem to make it financially-feasible to bring in any of these commercial or agricultural fungicides.

That being said, it is our hope that some of these fungicide manufacturers may eventually consider expanding their market and developing easy to apply smaller quantity/size products for homeowner use on their lawns. As I said, we are pursuing this and hope to be able to offer some kind of fairy ring solution in the not too distant future.

Here are some of the fungicide products that some claim work well. This is by no means a complete list; it's just the ones that we've thus far researched. We have no direct personal experience with any of these so we can't vouch for them as such. There may be other products in the marketplace that may work just as well or better, which we are not aware of at this point.

- Heritage
- Heritage TL
- Heritage G
- Prostar 70WP
- Prostar 70WG
- Mirage Stressguard
- Bayer Bayleton FLO
- Tartan Stressguard
- TM Agricultural

As mentioned, it's important that you act quickly and apply the fungicide where fairy rings have been observed in the past or at the first sign of new fairy ring development. Carefully follow the instructions according to the products' label and re-treat again if you begin to see symptoms again.

The above fungicides may provide some measure of control of the fairy ring fungi, but it all depends upon the 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. You might also check with your local greenhouse or garden center for any kind of fungicide product designed for fairy rings.

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 their lawn is to begin with.

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



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## **SOME PEOPLE FIND THE DIY APPROACH SUFFICIENT -**

There are many variations on this but this generally encompasses what most people DIY'ing it, would do. Some of the mix ratios may be different or the application frequency different, just as I would assume there are as many different lawns and degrees of severity of fairy rings, too. So, I leave that up to you to fine tune depending upon the results you experience. Yes, to some degree it will be a bit of an experiment. Some people have had great results over time... And some have reduced the problem a bit but can't seem to eliminate it.

1. Start off by removing the mushrooms. Dispose of them in the garbage (or consider burning them). Some suggest starting this process in early Spring or as soon as you may see mushrooms or other fungi appearing.
2. REMEMBER: In the case of type 4, the grass above fairy rings essentially dies of thirst because the fungus keeps water from reaching the roots. To counter this, jab a deep-root feeder or poke holes in the fairy ring about 2 to 3 inches apart from each other and up to a 6" to 18" inches depth the entire way around the ring. If you don't have a deep-root feeder, a pitch-fork will suffice, although it won't get as much water down deep.
3. Next, you need a surfactant... or a surface-active agent, a substance such as a detergent that, when added to a liquid, reduces its surface tension, thereby increasing its spreading and wetting properties. This will help the water get into the grass and hopefully penetrate down to the roots.
4. Add 2 tbsp. of liquid dish soap for every 3 gallons of water and mix well... Utilize ½ gallon of this mixture for every square foot of lawn that is infested with the fairy ring. Pour this mixture the whole way around the ring making sure it gets into those holes you made. Pour some into the midst of the ring, too.
5. Soak the area daily for 4 to 6 weeks. Use the liquid dish soap/water mixture each time to aid accessibility for the water.
6. Following a month of this treatment, use a high nitrogen fertilizer, and fertilize the entire area affected by the fairy ring. NOTE: At the very least, homeowners with type 1 or 2 can often "mask" their fairy ring problem, using nitrogen-rich fertilizers on their entire lawn. It may not get rid of the fungus, but it will green up their lawns significantly everywhere and thereby not make the fairy-ringed lush green areas look so apparent compared to the rest of their not-as lush and green looking lawn.

The above is NOT a cure. As I said, some homeowners have taken this approach and some greenhouses and local garden houses recommend it as having fairly good success over time. Subsequently when cutting your grass, you may want to mow this area first. Then disinfect the underside of your mower with a fungicide. Clean your footwear, too as that can transfer fungus spores to other areas of your lawn.

## **OTHER MEASURES -**

One measure we were recently told about that this person had good success with, was to use an 11-52 granular phosphate fertilizer liberally over the fairy ring area. She was a product specialist at a local Co-op Agri-Centre and was very knowledgeable and aware of fungal diseases that can affect crops, plants, and needless to say, grass, too. She did one application in May on her own lawn and it prevented the fairy ring growing any more. She did that in subsequent years and the fairy rings have never returned. Along with this they practised good lawn management techniques which of course helped very much, too. You have to remember that healthy lawns don't normally get fairy rings. It's typically unhealthy, poorly maintained or neglected lawns that are more susceptible. So whether it's the fertilizer and/or the good lawn management practices that she did for her particular lawn, what she did worked great.

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Others have had no choice but take drastic measures which included the total removal and digging out of the entire affected area and the soil below, as well as 18 inches beyond all sides of the ring or circle, too. That's a rather labour-intensive undertaking. New soil and sod or seed can be put down afterwards, essentially starting over the lawn from scratch. How deep you have to dig depends on how deep the fungus is. You'll need to dig out all the white mycelia (you'll know it when you see it), and even a few inches below the last visible strands. I've heard of some people digging depths of as little as only 6 to 12 inches down, and others all the way to 3 to 5 feet in depth to reach all the mycelia infrastructure in the ground.

## **PREVENTION IS KEY -**

Preventive measures for controlling fairy rings are much more effective than curing fairy rings when they may already be well-established within your lawn. As repeatedly mentioned, the best way to prevent fairy rings and other turf diseases from re-emerging on your lawn is to implement cultural practices which promote a healthy lawn.

1. Keep your lawn well watered.
2. Mow your lawn regularly and at the correct height.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.

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### **\*\*\* 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.***

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*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?*

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*

...See more on next page...

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*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Rust Diseases*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Powdery Mildew*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Dollar Spot*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Fairy Ring*

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## **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*

### **CORE AERATION:**

*Why Aerate Your Lawn?*

### **POWER RAKING:**

*Why Power-Rake Your Lawn?*

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