

Q. I have mushrooms coming up in my lawn and in my flower beds. Are they poisonous? How do I get rid of them?

A. The ample rain we have been experiencing these past several months have created the ideal conditions for many kinds of mushrooms to produce their 'fruit', the recognizable caps that we see above ground. The actual mushroom plant can be quite large underground, and can live for many years. The fruiting caps we call mushrooms release spores that drift on the wind to new sites, the fungal equivalent of seeds. Removing the mushrooms is a good idea if you have young children or pets. Do not eat wild mushrooms unless they have been positively identified by an expert to be edible. There are deadly mushrooms that grow in this area as well as edible, and telling them apart can be very difficult. There are no simple tests to determine which ones are edible and which ones are toxic.

Finding mushrooms in your lawn is not necessarily a symptom of a problem. The fungus may be growing on decaying wood, or decaying organic material, releasing nutrients into the soil. The fungus in your flower beds may be breaking down the mulch. These fungi are beneficial.

There are a few steps you can take to discourage the mushrooms. De-thatch and aerate your lawn to improve water penetration. This is an excellent idea after the pounding rains. You can sometimes eliminate mushrooms growing from organic matter by applying nitrogen fertilizer at a rate of 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn. The nitrogen should be readily available and not slow-release or water-insoluble formulations. Examples include 5 pounds of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) or special lawn fertilizers such as 6 pounds of 16-6-8 or 4 pounds of 27-3-4 per 1,000 square feet of lawn. Fertilization hastens decomposition of organic matter.

