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## Snow Cover Or Not, Snow Mold A Problem

Year in and year out, snow mold, or scald, may give many of you headaches. Because of the severity of the winter just past, many Northern regions should be prepared for an exceptional year of snow mold problems.

"In our area, since in many places the ground is not frozen underneath a heavy snow pack, there's going to be a lot of snow mold activity," says Dr. Richard Smiley, turfgrass pathologist at Cornell University. "This will be particularly severe where there have been no protective fungicides applied and where the soil has remained unfrozen throughout most or all of the winter."

Dr. Smiley points out that some areas, where the snow cover is limited or was blown off, do have a thick layer of frost in the ground. He says these areas shouldn't experience as many snow mold problems as he predicts for heavy snow covered locations. But these snowless regions aren't immune to snow mold, either.

Two problem snow molds are Typhula Blight (gray snow mold) and Fusarium Patch (pink snow mold). Smiley says the Typhula Blight is prevalent when there is a good snow cover. Meanwhile, Fusarium Patch can work on open ground as well.

"In northern New York, we can have relatively severe problems with Fusarium Patch throughout the year," says Dr. Smiley.

The same situation exists to the west.

"The longer we have snow, the more chance there is for problems with snow mold", says Dr. M.C. Shurtleff, Extension plant pathologist at the University of Illinois. Shurtleff says the snow mold problem will cause the most damage in areas where the snow cover is deep and slowest to melt.

Snow mold can raise havoc with your turfgrass. Shurtleff alerts you to keep an eye out for this disease. He says snow mold is especially a problem where snow has been packed down. Thus, areas of golf courses and lawns that have been traveled over by tractors, cars, snowmobiles and the like are more susceptible to the disease.

Shurtleff says the best defense against snow mold is application of a protective fungicide in the fall. But this solution won't help you control a snow mold problem now. So what can you do if you see a snow mold problem developing in your turfgrass?

Dr. Smiley gave some suggestions. "We have done trials at Cornell to try and find the best way to get recovery of grass when it is coming out of winter in a pretty tattered and torn condition. Fungicides were applied as soon as we saw the disease when snow was receding, but at that point in time the fungicides just didn't help us at all.

Continued on next page . . .

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"Snow cover or not . . ." continued.

"What has helped most of all is physically raking that grass up," Dr. Smiley continued. "When it's molded it is flat and horizontal, not getting much light. By physically raking it you get the leaves upright so the sun rays can get down to the soil and be absorbed sooner. Thus the soil warms up sooner, and you get better bud germination." Dr. Smiley adds that a light fertilizer application when you are raking up the spots will assist in getting a quicker regrowth.

You should keep a close eye on your turf. Have your rake and a little fertilizer ready so you can catch any snow mold problems early this spring.

Shurtleff says the best time to control snow mold is by taking measures in the fall. It's recommended in Northern states that you do not fertilize after September 15. Avoid having your turf growing at a fast rate as it heads into winter. Keep the grass cut to recommended height to prevent a mat of grass from forming. And before the first heavy snow and during winter thaws, treat turf with a fungicide recommended by your turf dealer.

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