

Identifying and Controlling Pink and Gray Snow Molds on Turfgrass

By Joe Rimelspach
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As snow and ice melt away and with the arrival of spring weather, lawn owners will be venturing out into the landscape. This will generate many questions about the condition of their lawn and what to do to help it recover from the harsh winter weather. Snow molds are present on many lawns.

The occurrence of snow molds is highly dependent on environmental factors and the turf grass species at the site. Different fungi can be involved, but *Typhula* species (gray snow molds) and *Microdochium nivale* (pink snow mold) referred to as *Fusarium nivale*, are the most common. These fungi commonly grow where there is snow cover or during cool, wet periods of winter and spring. All cool season grasses are susceptible. The two diseases may occur together or individually. Reports last spring indicate simultaneous activity on many lawns. Disease development is extensive on lush turf with wet unfrozen soil and snow cover.

Symptoms

Affected turf is usually noticed in early spring. Patches (more or less circular) may be a whitish tan straw color from 1 inch to 3 feet in diameter; commonly the areas are 3" to 12" in diameter. Leaves are matted together and the patch appears sunken. When the patches are wet, they appear slimy; when dry the texture is more like a crust of dead leaves. During some periods, the pink snow mold may have a slight pinkish color on the outer edge of the patch; the two diseases appear very similar.

The gray snow molds (*Typhula* sp.) can be positively identified by the presence of sclerotia (small seedlike structures) 1/16 to 1/8 inch in diameter. Sclerotia are dark reddish brown to black and found on leaves of diseased plants.

Management

To minimize damage from these diseases, manage the environment to favor healthy turf:

- 1) PROMOTE GROWTH AND RECOVERY
- 2) Rake damaged turfgrass to let light and air into the crowns to encourage growth and recovery.
- 3) If the lawn is tall and has a lot of dead leaves, mow it short one time to remove dead grass and rake it away. Use debris 7 as a mulch or compost. If areas are dead, renovation will be needed. Check the crowns of plants to see if they are alive. Living crowns will be white and have a moist "healthy" appearance. If there are questions about possible regrowth, take a section of damaged turf and try to grow it indoors to see if new leaves develop.

Fungicides

Materials that are applied as a preventative in the fall are not effective as a curative. Spring applications may accelerate turf recovery. Follow all label instructions.

Gray Snow Molds (*Typhula* sp.)

- Pentachloronitobenzene (PCNB)
- Iprodione + chlorothalonil

Pink Snow Molds (*Microdochium nivale*)

- PCNB
- Iprodione
- Vinclozolin
- Thiophanate methyl

FOR HELP

Send a sample to the Plant and Pest Diagnostic Clinic at the Department of Plant Pathology, The Ohio State University, Columbus. Submit it with a Turfgrass Specimen Form, available at your County OSU Extension Office.

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