

Controlling Snow Mold

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Courtesy of Cornell University Turfgrass Times

Over the past few years the entire northeastern United States has been under severe snow mold pressure. This has been due to the unusually heavy and persistent snow cover as well as the wet and cool spring conditions. It is time now to begin considering strategies for minimizing snow mold damage this winter and the following spring.

In New York, two major snow mold diseases cause problems on home lawns and golf courses: gray snow mold, or *Typhula* blight, caused primarily by *Typhula incarnata*; and pink snow mold, or *Fusarium* patch, caused by *Microdochium nival*. These diseases each affect turfgrasses quite differently, with pink snow mold being potentially the most damaging. The management strategies for snow mold diseases necessarily must be multifaceted, including cultural, biological and chemical approaches.

Fertility Management

Fertility management is key to minimizing snow mold damage. It is important to avoid heavy fertilizer application late in the fall to avoid stimulating unnecessary foliar growth that is more susceptible to infection. Fertilization should occur much earlier or should be applied as dormant applications. Often, heavy dormant applications of organic fertilizers, particularly those that are compost-based, are quite helpful in minimizing snow mold damage. These materials provide significant levels of biological activity that help to suppress the activities of the snow mold pathogens. Applications to sensitive areas of between 10 and 200 lbs./1,000 sq. ft. have been effective. However, make sure that composts are adequately stabilized and have an "earthy" odor. Material applied at rates of 200 lbs./1,000 sq. ft. must be removed from golf course turf prior to breaking dormancy in the spring.

Water Management

Water management is another key component of successful snow mold management. It is important that turfgrass soils be well-drained and free of significant levels of compaction. It is often helpful to maintain lawn turf at a minimum cutting height so that a dense turf canopy, which often holds more moisture and maintains higher relative humidity, does not become snow covered. Thatch accumulation should also be kept to a minimum since excessive thatch levels can result in high levels of water retention. It is equally important to reduce the amount of snow cover,

if at all practical, and to prevent compaction of the snow cover on disease-prone areas. Generally, the greater the snow cover, the longer the soil pH (less than 6.0) and balanced soil fertility is particularly important in reducing pink snow mold damage.

Fungicide Applications

Preventive fungicide applications are quite helpful in minimizing snow mold damage. However, oftentimes the fungicides effective against *Typhula* blight are not always effective against pink snow mold. Among the better choices for fungicide applications are chlorothalonil (e.g., Daconil 2787 40F) applied at 8 oz./1,000 sq. ft. or propiconazole (Banner 1.1E) applied at 4 oz./1,000 sq. ft. These fungicides are usually applied in late October to early December. Banner should be applied toward the early part of that window whereas Daconil may be applied in early December prior to snow cover.

In the spring, be sure to rake out any diseased areas to facilitate drying and fertilize to promote turfgrass growth. Snow molds generally are not devastating, but, if left untreated, could destroy vast areas of turf. So take some time now to prepare your turf for next spring.

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