

The Woodstock Mystery

by David Fairbank

I stood there scrutinizing the home we had purchased in Woodstock, Virginia, knowing full well that it needed a lot of work, most importantly, pressure washing, for sure. The mildew on the shady side of the double garage and on the offset in the front, between the garage and the main part of the house, especially needed deep cleaning. I was certain that the house was cream-colored vinyl siding and not pale yellow as it now appeared, and I hoped that a good cleaning would bear that out. But, as I stood there mulling over what other improvements I could do, my eye was drawn to the thousands of small black dots on the siding, dots the size of a straight pin head. Not only were the dots on the siding but on the white porch railings and roof supports. It almost looked as though someone had shot my house with a shotgun and the resulting patterns. I would estimate four to six dots per square inch. I scraped a few with my fingernail only to have the cap scrape off but the stain underneath remaining. Oh, I had friends tell me fly droppings, and even spider droppings, but, it wasn't until Kelly Day stopped over one evening to give me an estimate for pressure washing the house and rear deck, that the mystery deepened.

As Kelly looked over the house and the deck across the rear of the home, he assured me that he could make the house look much like it did eight years ago when it was new. But, he wouldn't guarantee that the spots on the siding and the porch supports and railings would come off. What in the world is this, I asked, fly or spider droppings? He chuckled at that, no, he replied, it's "shotgun fungus". He assured me that someone from the extension office had told him that was what he was seeing all over the Shenandoah Valley. Well, I was skeptical to be sure of this explanation. I didn't have a phone in the house at this point and couldn't check out the diagnosis on the Internet until I returned to Sterling later in the week. When I did return, to "Yahoo" I went, typed in "shotgun fungus", and there it was, six or eight possible sites to check out. Since one site was a Penn State report, the rest were irrelevant. The report said, common name, "artillery fungus", or "shotgun fungus". Now I don't know about any of you, but, I've been in the green industry since 1957 and I've never run into this phenomenon before, and some older, wiser men than me, never have either. A synopsis of the Penn State report said that certain, but by no means all, hardwood trees that are shredded for "hardwood mulch" are infected. There are certain mulches that will not be infected, i.e., cypress and pine bark to name two. It appears that in infected beds, mainly during the spring and fall, with temperatures between 50 and 68 degrees, the fungus spore masses form and the fruiting body points itself towards strong light sources, such as sun-reflecting glass and light colored buildings and cars. Five hours after the fruiting body forms, it explodes upward and outward with fine droplets of liquid. The velocity of this explosion is 1/10,000 HP, and the drop-

lets land on anything within a 10 to 20 foot radius from the source. I have used shredded hardwood on the golf course since the early 60s and have never seen this, but now that I'm looking, I am seeing it. While at Walter Montross's home, I found signs of some on his porch supports and window shutters. His problem is not of the nature as mine, but, it's there in Vienna as well.

Imagine, for a moment, that Mrs. Schwartz, the wife of the club president, pulls up in front of your clubhouse and parks her car, a "polar white", 2002 Mercedes. She parks it right beside a beautifully landscaped bed, full of beautiful daffodils and tulips. Further, this bed is covered with infected shredded hardwood mulch, to the preferred depth of three inches. Suddenly, just as she enters the clubhouse door, a tremendous explosion occurs, of course, at a velocity of 1/10,000 HP, no one can hear it. After being in the clubhouse office briefly, she returns to find her once, "polar white", 2002 Mercedes, covered with thousands of black specs, probably only on one side though, but, the roof, and trunk will receive the blast too. Let's all hope, for your sake, Mr. Golf Course Superintendent, she doesn't look up this report, or one like it, on the Internet at the following address: <http://aginfo.psu.edu/news/july97/fungus.html>.

By the way, Mr. Schwartz will find out when his wife gets home, that once the liquid has dried on the "polar white" 2002 Mercedes, he will have to have the car repainted...won't he be happy!!!!



GCSAA

Education

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR THE TURFGRASS SYSTEM

Tuesday, December 11, 2001

8:00 am to 5:00 pm

Turf Valley Resort and Conference Center

Ellicott City, MD

Held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Assoc. of GCS

Member Fee: \$120

Non-member Fee: \$180

CEUs: 0.7; Code: 02RS113-01

Textbook: "Management of Turfgrass Diseases"
Strongly Recommended (\$85.00)

Brought to you by the Mid-Atlantic Association of GCS

TEXTRON
GOLF, TURF & SPECIALTY PRODUCTS

For more information or to register, Call (800) 472-7878