



SLIME MOLDS



INTRODUCTION:

Since molds belong to a class of fungi, the *Myxomycetes*, that are characterized by production of relatively large single-celled plasmodia (singular = plasmodium). Plasmodia are the feeding stages of slime molds, and they are frequently seen on lawns, small plants, mulch, and decaying wood in the late summer. Slime molds are not plant parasites, but they may injure plants by covering and shading them.

SYMPTOMS:

Slime molds are frequently observed when they form large colonies on mulch around trees or shrubs. They may initially appear as a slimy mound or mass, come in a variety of colors, and are often unsightly. (Sometimes compared to vomit) Although slime molds are not plant parasites, they may injure plants by covering and shading them.

LIFE CYCLE:

Slime molds are like other fungi in that they reproduce by way of spores. When the spores are moistened, they germinate and give rise to microscopic amoeba-like organisms that either “flow” or swim in the films of water. These organisms are larger than bacterial cells and will engulf and digest bacteria, as they are encountered. Eventually, several amoebae fuse, and when this happens, growth of the plasmodium begins. The plasmodium also preys upon bacteria and must have a moist substrate on which to move. If conditions are favorable and food is plentiful, a circular plasmodium may become 2 feet or more in diameter. Most, however, are smaller than that and form a delicate net of brown, yellow, pink, or white slime where they grow. The plasmodium moves relatively rapidly and may traverse a distance of several feet in a day.

When substrates (logs, turf, mulch, etc.) dry and conditions for growth are no longer favorable, plasmodia aggregate to form spore-producing structures that resemble miniature puffballs. The “puffballs” may or may not be on stalks, their colors range from chocolate-brown to bluish grey to white, and their intricate beauty has attracted the interest of many naturalists. A new crop of spores forms within the structures, and the spores are blown by the wind to eventually settle in new locations and start new colonies.

CONTROL:

Slime molds will disappear if left alone, but their unsightly appearance may necessitate more rapid removal. On mulch, they can be raked or turned under, and on turf they can be mowed. They can also be washed away with a

forceful spray from a garden hose. Firewood should remain in free of slime mold colonization if it is kept covered and dry.

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Reviewed: 9/95 - Lee Douglas and Paul Zaul, 1981
Slime molds. National Geographic 160 (1): 131-136

Reviewed 7/04 7/06 FS 909

Source: <http://plantclinic.cornell.edu/factheets/slimemold/slimemold.htm>

FS 909

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