Snow Molds in Lawns Spring 2020

At this time of year, we are starting to see areas with fluffy mycelium on our lawns (Figure 1A), especially in areas with matted grass and melting snow. These mycelial mats are signs of snow mold. There are two types of snow mold, Gray Snow Mold (Typhula blight caused by *Typhula* sp.) and Pink Snow Mold (Fusarium patch caused by *Microdochium nivale*). They are fungal diseases that appear in lawns as straw-colored circular patches, which continue to enlarge as long as the grass remains wet and cold (Figure 1B). Snow molds usually do not occur every year but are more common when an early snow cover doesn't allow the ground to freeze.

Symptoms and Life Cycle

Gray snow mold is active at temperatures slightly below freezing and up to about 45°F or as long as the lawn stays wet and cool. Fungal growth begins in the late fall/early winter underneath the snow on unfrozen ground. When the snow begins to melt, gray/white patches will appear with webby material (Figure 1A). The fungus will then begin to form yellow structures that turn dark brown when mature (Figure 1C), known as sclerotia. Sclerotia will survive hot summer temperatures in soil or in plant debris. In the fall, the cycle begins again as the sclerotia begin to germinate and colonize the lawn.

Pink snow mold is active at temperatures from approximately 32°F to 60°F. Just like gray snow mold, fungal growth begins under snow cover on unfrozen ground. In the spring, white/pink circular mycelium patches will form on the leaf blades. At the center of the patch, spores will be produced that can be dispersed by heavy rains and cultural practices. Unlike gray snow mold, pink mold can occasionally form without snow cover in wet, cool, matted grass.

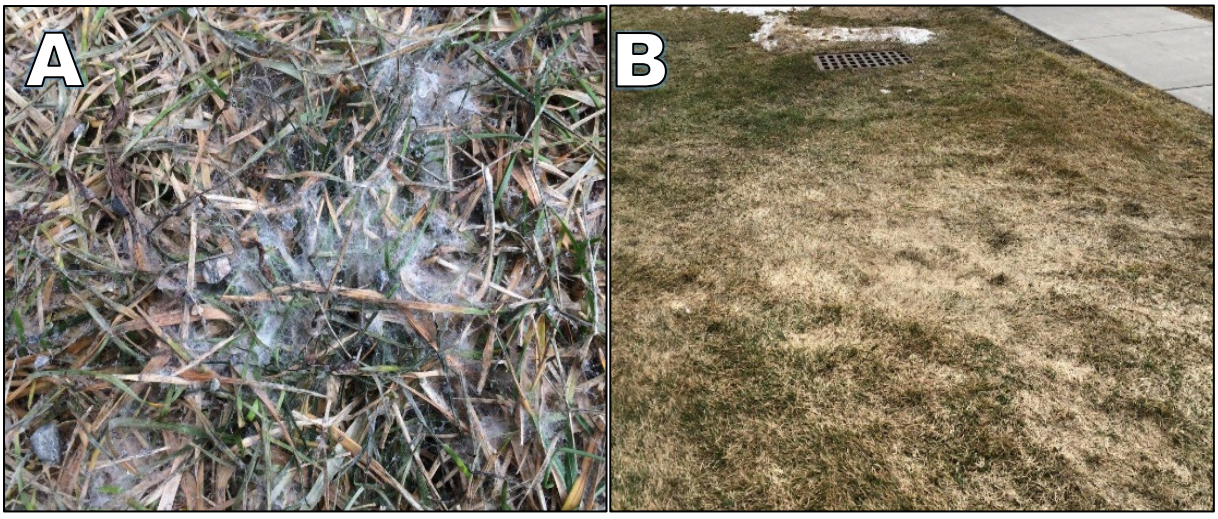

Figure 1A: Mycelial growth on turf grass. B. Matted turf grass affected by snow mold.

Figure 1C: Fruiting structures start to form on leaf blades.

Disease Management

In spring, raking the matted area will help to promote drying and warming up of the lawn, which will slow down or eliminate further development of the disease. Fungicides are usually not recommended. Snow mold damage is seldom serious in the urban setting and the infected areas will only take a little longer to green up. Snow molds can easily be prevented by avoiding excessive nitrogen applications in the fall, raking up leaves in the fall, and mowing grass at recommended heights until it is no longer actively growing. Try to avoid piling up snow onto the lawn.

References

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Smiley R., Dernoeden P, Clark B. 2007. Compendium of Turfgrass Diseases third edition. Page 51-52.

Sincerely,

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