

# Snow Mold

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At this time of the year, we are starting to see fluffy mycelium growing on our lawns, especially in areas where the snow is just melting. 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 on lawns in circular patches as a webby mass (Figure 1A). The most common time to spot the fungus is in early spring as the snow melts in matted grass (Figure 1B). They 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 or turf stays wet and cool. Fungal growth begins in the late fall/early winter beneath the snow on unfrozen ground. When the snow begins to melt, gray/white patches will appear as 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 through summer temperatures in soil or plant debris. In fall the cycle begins again as the sclerotia begin to colonize after the first snow cover.

*Pink snow mold* is active at temperatures from approximately 32°F to 60°F. Just like gray snow mold, fungal growth begins with snow cover on unfrozen ground. In the spring white/pink mycelium patches will form on the grass leaf blades in circular shapes. At the center of the patch conidia (spores) will be produced that can be dispersed from heavy rains and mowing. 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. C. Fruiting structures start to form on leaf blades.

## **Disease Management**

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. If a snow mold does appear in the spring, raking the matted area will help aerate and increase temperature, which will slow or eliminate further development of the disease. Fungicides are not recommended unless there is a severe case or at golf courses and sports fields as preventive practices. Snow mold damage is seldom serious and the infected areas will take a little longer to green up than the uninfected areas.

## **Reference**

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

### *Disclaimer:*

*These recommendations are provided only as a guide. It is always the pesticide applicator's responsibility, by law, to read and follow all current label directions for specific pesticide being used. Due to constantly changing labels and product registration, some of the recommendations given in this writing may no longer be legal by the time you read them. If any information in these recommendations disagrees with the label, the recommendation must be disregarded. No endorsement is intended for products mentioned. The authors and Montana State University assume no liability resulting from the use of these recommendations.*