

Plant Pathology Fact Sheet

Slime Mold, Lichens and Sooty Mold Problems on Plants

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Slime Mold

Slime molds are amoeba-like organisms which feed on bacteria and yeasts in the soil. During cloudy, humid weather these molds grow out of the soil and creep onto whatever is available. Turfgrass, weeds, strawberries, bedded flowers, and ground covers, as well as mulches, sidewalks and driveways may become covered with masses of gray, yellowish or black dusty spores.

While slime molds frequently cause considerable concern among growers and homeowners, these fungi do not feed on plant tissue. Slime molds merely use low lying vegetation and other objects as support during their reproductive stage. Some damage may occur, however, when the fungal growth is heavy causing the shaded plant parts to turn yellow.

Controls are generally not necessary since slime molds do little harm and usually disappear with the onset of dry weather. When slime mold infestations are heavy,



“DOG VOMIT” SLIME MOLD GROWING ON MULCH

spore masses may be broken up with a rake or a broom. Hosing with a strong stream of water is also effective but should only be done after the onset of dry weather when the threat of further development is past. Washing off slime molds during prolonged wet weather will only help to spread the organism to previously unaffected areas. Slime molds which form thick layers or masses can be removed by hand or by removing the affected plant part.

Lichens

A lichen is actually composed of two different organisms, an alga and a fungus, which grow together for the mutual benefit of one another. These crusty or leaf-like organisms may be a variety of colors, including brown, gray, green, yellow and white.

Lichens form on a variety of surfaces, such as rocks, soil, and fallen logs, as well as on the bark of living trees. When lichens are noticed on trees, they are often thought to

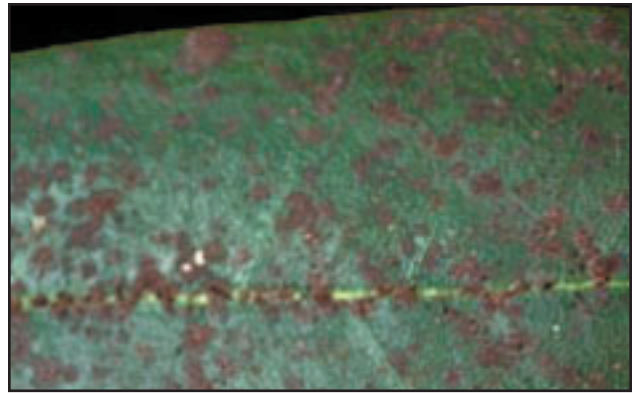


LICHEN ON THE TRUNK OF A MAPLE TREE

be of disease organism. Lichens frequently appear on the trunks or branches of trees that are in poor or declining condition. While their presence may indicate there is a problem, they are not in themselves harmful.

Sooty Mold

Sooty molds are dark-spored fungi which grow on the sugary “honeydew” excretions of certain insects. Aphids are the most common honeydew producers, but other



SOOTY MOLD ON A RHODENDRON LEAF

sucking insects (such as white flies and scale insects) may also leave honeydew deposits. Honeydew may drip from the site of insect activity onto objects or plants below (e.g. cars, houses, signs, ground covers). The dark-colored fungi growing on these excretions give plant surfaces or other objects a black, sooty appearance. Sooty mold fungi derive their nutrition from the honeydew and not from the plant. When sooty mold growth is heavy, the shaded tissue may turn yellow. We most frequently observe sooty mold problems on tuliptree and various species of pine.

Sooty mold growth can be prevented by controlling the insect or insects responsible for leaving honeydew deposits. Your County Extension Agent or Extension Entomologist can recommend an insecticide. Generally, the sooty mold fungi can be left alone to “weather off” with time. While the black growth may be considered “unsightly”, it will rarely endanger the plant’s health.

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