

Ag Column
Chris Ramsey
June 2020

Fairy Rings in the Landscape

You may have seen a dark green circle or arc in your lawn or in your community. These dark green areas in a lawn are known as fairy rings, commonly seen in the spring and fall.

Dr. Richard L. Duble, Texas Cooperative Extension Turf Specialist, notes that the name, fairy ring, originated many centuries ago. It was thought that the rings appeared where fairies had danced the night before. Many Irish believed the mushrooms were resting stools for the fairies during the dance. My family and I visited Ireland last year. A tour guide shared if an Irish person were superstitious, they would not want to buy land that had fairy rings to avoid bad luck.

The rings are caused by a fungus which breaks down organic matter in the soil. Often, the organic matter is that of a tree stump, tree roots, logs, or any other organic matter that remains after a tree has been removed. As the fungus breaks down organic matter, nitrogen is produced which fertilizes the grass causing the dark green ring. The fungal mycelium can become so dense preventing water from penetrating the soil. When this happens, the grass dies causing a brown ring. Dark green rings seem to be more common. During wetter periods in the spring and fall, mushrooms may sprout within the rings. Mushrooms may also sprout in a lawn that are not part of a fairy ring.

While there are fungicides labeled for the control of fairy rings, their effectiveness is often questionable. Masking the symptoms of the ring is probably the best approach for those who don't like the appearance. Duble notes aerification and irrigating the area may prevent the brown ring. Fertilization of the area will result in a darker green lawn hiding the effects of the fairy ring.

Mushrooms will also grow in a circular pattern where you have fairy rings. Regular mowing will help manage the emerging mushrooms.

I actually find the fairy rings intriguing as I drive around this time of year. You will see many different sizes of fairy rings. Some will be a full ring while others are a partial circle. They are most noticeable in a field or lawn that hasn't been fertilized.