

Ag Column
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Artillery Fungus in the Landscape

Do you have small black spots on your car or maybe on your house? When found on a car, these small black spots are often attributed to fresh tar on newly paved roads. Instead, these black tar-like spots are spores from the artillery fungus.

Artillery fungus can grow on the decomposing “wood” portion of mulch. The fungus develops small spore cups that sit on top of the mulch. The fungus can propel these spores 18 to 20 feet outward and six feet upward. The fungal spores often land on cars, the siding of homes, and even nearby plants. These small spores, which are about the size of the period at the end of this sentence, are almost impossible to remove.

These fungal spores are more likely to appear during the cooler weather of spring and fall. Appearing the same time as many plant diseases and insect damage, the spots can sometimes be mistaken for a plant problem.

Unfortunately, there is not any fungicidal control to prevent the growth of the artillery fungus. However, since the fungal spore cups develop on rotting wood material, the fungal spores can be minimized by making sure you get mulch that is mostly bark. You can also freshen mulched areas with a light layer of new mulch each year, making sure the depth is not greater than 4 inches, or maybe just stir the existing layer. Remember, roots like to breathe too!

Inorganic mulches such as stone can be a good option as the artillery fungus doesn't grow on non-organic materials. Stone mulches tend to be hotter and make planting more difficult. The life span of a stone material is much longer but it can be difficult to keep stone separate from the soil. Pine needles are also a good mulch choice, especially for acid-loving plants.

So, now you can stop blaming that newly paved road for those ugly spots on your new car. Call your local Extension Office for more information about the artillery fungus and mulch alternatives.