



Question of the Week

Q: I need help controlling the black mold spores that cling to my home's siding and windows. We've used a lot of bark mulch around the periphery of our home and in our ornamental gardens. I think the mulch may be the source of the spores. What can I do?

A: You have a problem with artillery fungus, a wood-decay fungus that can live and thrive on bark mulch. It commonly occurs on dead trees, dead branches, and rotting wood. If infested material is ground into mulch, the artillery fungus may be already present when the load of mulch arrives at a site. Under cool, moist conditions, the fungus will grow rapidly.

People can also spread this fungus. Some homeowners make the mistake of sanding, scraping, or otherwise removing the spore masses from the sides of their houses, and letting them fall into the foundation mulch. Such spores inoculate the mulch, which then produces a new generation of the fungus.

The dark spore masses of the artillery fungus stick like super-glue. Most people have no success removing them from a home's siding without leaving a stain or damaging the siding, especially old, dry siding. Power washing may work on brand new vinyl siding that still has its shiny, oily, sheen.

There's nothing you can spray on the mulch to get rid of this fungus. Instead, remove all the infested mulch (just around the foundation, not further out in the yard), bag it up, and dispose of it with the trash. Then put down a layer of black plastic and overlay it with stone or another inorganic mulch.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@ceunh.unh.edu