



Question of the Week

Q. Yikes! What can I do about that the huge yellow blob growing in the bark mulch around the rhododendrons?

A. Inelegantly compared to dog vomit or scrambled eggs, these blobs (*Fuligo septica*) are one of an unusual class of organisms called slime molds, or myxomycetes. They arise from spores that may have been present on the bark of a tree before it was harvested, or may have blown in on the wind.

During periods of high humidity or rain, the spores absorb moisture and burst, each releasing a single, amoeba-like cell that forages through the shredded bark mulch gobbling up bacteria and other microscopic particles. Triggered by some combination of moisture, temperature and food supply, these individual cells come together to form a giant mass, which looks and acts like a single organism. The mass creates a thin layer of slime around itself to prevent moisture loss. Scientists call the “blob” stage of the slime mold’s life cycle a *plasmodium*.

The plasmodium’s shiny, gelatinous surface, its bright yellow, orange or pink color and rapid growth give it an other-worldly, somewhat frightening appearance. But slime molds don’t harm plants or animals and disappear after a few days, so you don’t need to apply any control measures. If you find a slime mold really bothersome, you can hose it down or pick it up on a shovel and move it out of sight.

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@unh.edu