

After the snows: Lawn devastation widespread in Metro Vancouver

By Steve Whysall

The Vancouver Sun, Friday, March 13, 2009



*Lawn specialist David Wall shows "snow mould" lawn damage done over winter, in North Vancouver.
Photograph by: Glenn Baglo, Vancouver Sun*

VANCOUVER - Is your lawn a mess? Does it look dead? Want to know how to bring it back to life and make it lush and green again?

Well, the first thing to know is that many lawns and sports fields in Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley have been devastated this winter by snow mold, a fungal problem caused by extensive snow cover. It is problem more common to lawns in Alberta, Saskatchewan and eastern Canada.

The damaged is only becoming obvious this month as home owners start to notice that their lawns look either completely dead or have irregular dead patches, covered by grey or pink cottony fungal growth, symptoms of snow mold.

According to grass expert David Wall, of Premier Pacific Seeds of Surrey, this is the worst devastation we have seen in 40 years.

"You have to look back to 1969 to find anything on this scale," he says. "It has all been caused by the rare weather pattern we had this winter with snow covering lawns for many weeks."

Wall says snow mold fungi has attacked lawns "with a vengeance." Long periods of snow cover and near-zero degree temperatures allowed the organism to get a grip, he says.

Pink snow mold is the worst kind. It starts out looking more grey than pink and can kill blades of grass as well as the root system.



Grey snow mold is less damaging. It rarely does more than kill off the top of the grass, leaving a lawn looking brown and patchy. A lawn will recover if left alone but it can take all of summer to do it.

"This is a huge problem this year," say Wall. "Turf farms have been affected by it and many sports fields as well as thousands of home lawns."

The most effective solution is to liberally overseed and regrow your lawn back to its former glory. It is best to use the most suitable grass seed for coastal gardens - perennial rye. Elka 2, Elka 3 and Major League are three brands of grass seed that contain a high content of perennial rye and are all highly rated for overseeding.

To prevent the problem from recurring next year, it is recommended that home owners not fertilize a lawn after August and make sure grass is cut short before winter. It is also advisable to avoid compacting snow on a lawn by shovelling it into slow-melting deep piles - the cause of the problem in the first place.

European chafer beetles are the other big devastator of lawns this spring, although the problem is still mainly confined to New Westminster, Burnaby and East Vancouver.

The sign that a lawn has a chafer infestation is turf that has been torn up by crows, raccoons and skunks. They rip up the grass in search of chafer grubs, which have risen to the soil surface to hatch.

The recommended response is to stamp the grass back down, reseed or returf, and water with nematodes in the specific three-week window of opportunity, the third or fourth week of July or the first week of August. (Garden centres sell nematodes and can give more advice on this.)

swhysall@vancouver.sun.com

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun