

Recovery from snow mold in the lawn

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A month ago, much of Nebraska was covered in a thick blanket of snow. This layer of snow insulated our turf from the arctic blast in mid-February, but also created an ideal environment for snow mold development (*Microdochium nivale*). The recent snow melt has revealed the extent of the damage. Affected areas have large circles of matted grass, sometimes with pink margins or white mycelium (resembling spider webs). This has left many homeowners wondering what to do next.



The damage appears to be limited to taller mowed grasses like lawns and rough that was still relatively green before the snow. Shaded areas north of trees, fences or other structures were particularly hard hit because these areas tend to stay greenest during the winter. This live and healthy tissue was ideal food for the snow mold pathogen. Short-mowed and exposed areas were generally less affected because much of that tissue was brown from solar bleaching during the winter. The exception was turf underneath protective covers including athletic fields.

Fortunately, pink snow mold mainly affects the leaf foliage and is rarely lethal. New leaf tissue will emerge from the crown this spring and the impacted foliage will be removed by mowing. The key to recovery is patience. Do not try to force growth with fertilizer, scalping or other aggressive management. It is still early in the spring. Homeowners can lightly rake the surface to hide the patches. In 2009, I tested different recovery treatment following severe snow mold on a Kentucky bluegrass lawn. None of the cultivation treatments accelerated recovery and some, like scalping the turf, weakened the turf stand for the remainder of the summer.

The excitement for spring is always great this time of year. Implement other landscape management practices like removal of old leaves, pruning, etc., while we all wait for the grass to naturally wake up.

Bill Kreuser, Assistant Professor and Turfgrass Extension Specialist, wkreuser2@unl.edu