

# Mushrooms Abundant after Ample Rainfall

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Heidi Sheesley

'Flaming Torch' is a naturalized blood lily that will break the monotony of any landscape with its large, globe-shaped, vibrant orange flower heads that are up to 6 inches in diameter.



PHOTO BY William M. Johnson

An abundance of mushrooms growing in circles or fragments of circles appeared in lawns and along roadways after the recent rainstorms.



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Prolonged rainy weather has left most of us looking at soils that range from wet to waterlogged. At times I could have used a larger capacity rain gauge. When folks complain about the rainfall, I usually resist the urge to re-remind them of the record-setting temperatures and drought of 2011.

After an extended period of rainfall with warm temperatures, we typically see a few mushrooms popping up here and a few popping up there. After the recent round of daily or almost-daily rainfall over the

past two weeks, mushrooms seemed to have popped up most everywhere.

Some types of mushrooms grow in a random pattern while other types grow in a distinctive circular-to-elliptical pattern known as a "fairy ring." The term "fairy ring" dates back to the Middle Ages when blood-letting was common practice and flies were thought to arise from rotting meat. People also had various ideas about where circles of mushrooms or other large fungal structures

came from.

Some people thought the devil churned butter in the middle of the ring, while other folks thought fairies danced in the center. Despite such stories, some considered it lucky to have fairy rings in a field near their house. You might, however, get a strong counter-argument from today's homeowners and turf managers who have fairy rings in their turf. Mystery and mythology aside, fairy rings are caused by fungi. More precisely, we now know that fairy rings aren't made by fairies



or the devil. They are the fruiting structures of underground fungi. Several species of mushrooms can form into fairy rings. Mushrooms are the reproductive part that forms from fungal threads that live and grow in the soil or thatch (the layer of dead and living plant parts that develops between the grass and the soil surface).

Fairy rings are typically seen from August through October, but that's not a hard and fast rule. In some years they're more common than others because they're sensitive to environmental conditions. Fairy rings may look like a full circle, a semi-circle or as just fragments of a circle.

An obvious question is why do they grow in circles? The whole phenomenon begins with one small piece of fungal thread (known as hyphae) or a single spore. From that tiny particle, a mass of threads radiates in all directions like tendrils reaching towards food. The fungus will keep growing, hidden from sight, until it runs out of a food source or the environment becomes unfavorable.

Fairy ring fungi don't directly infect lawns, but cause damage by interfering with water movement to the roots of grass plants. In order for the fungus to absorb nutrients, certain materials in the soil must be dissolved by the fungus into a useable form. The grass is essentially fertilized by the by-

products of this process. The most active part of the fungus is at the outer edge of the ring, so that's where the fruiting bodies form and thus forming a circular pattern.

So, what can you do if you want to get rid of a fairy ring? Fairy rings, as with other nuisance mushrooms or puffballs, are difficult to control since there are no effective and simple chemical procedures available to homeowners. Most fairy rings are present for only a few years and eventually outgrow themselves.

If mushrooms on the lawn make you happy, or you're at least agreeable to letting Mother Nature take her course, then sit back, relax and enjoy the show when it occurs. Unlike lawn grass, you can almost watch fairy ring mushrooms grow.

### Plant of the Week

A Plant of the Week will be featured weekly over the next 3 weeks. Plants featured have a proven record of performing well in the Galveston County growing area and will be available at the 2014 Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale to be held on Saturday, October 11, at Carbide Park in La Marque.

This week's featured plant is *Scadoxus puniceus* 'Flaming Torch'. 'Flaming Torch' is a naturalized blood lily that will break the monotony of any landscape with its large, globe-shaped, vibrant orange flower heads that are up to 6 inches in

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diameter. Flowers are borne on sturdy 20- to 24-inch stalks early in spring. Like its more well-known cousin, the African Blood Lily, Flaming Torch's spectacular color display begins before its glossy foliage emerges.

The lineage of Flaming Torch can be traced back to South Africa. It has become naturalized in southern areas of the USA (Zone 8a) and will continue to reward you year after year with its stunning blooms. Although they bloom for only a week or two, when they're in full flower, Flaming Torch makes quite a conversation piece in the garden. Topping off each 8- to 10-inch tall plant is a huge spherical orange-red umbel of nearly 200 tiny flowers.

A limited supply of Flaming Torch and other hard-to-find plants for the landscape will be available at the 2014 Plant Sale on Saturday, October 11. Visit our website (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>) for updates and map directions.

Add one or more Flaming Torch plants to your home landscape and count the returns year after year as the number of plants and blooms increases.

