

## **Fairy Rings**

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Fairy rings are circles of dark green grass that seem to magically appear in the lawn. They increase in size over time and often include mushrooms or a second ring of dead or dying grass. They can disappear and then reappear, making them all the more mysterious.

According to European folklore, fairy rings are gateways into elfin kingdoms or places where elves gather and dance. In reality, fairy rings are caused by the growth of fungi in the soil.

The dark green circle in a fairy ring is the lush growth of grass feeding on nutrients released as the fungus breaks down organic matter in the soil. The mushrooms, more commonly seen in the spring or fall, are one of the ways that the fungus reproduces itself. The ring of dead grass is caused by the development of a dense fungal mat below the ground surface that prevents the movement of air and water. The grass turns yellow or brown where the fungal growth is the thickest.

Fairy rings are difficult to control. To get rid of one, you must remove the grass and soil from an area that is at least one foot beyond the outer edge of the ring and one foot deep and replace it with uncontaminated soil. If you don't remove all parts of the fungus (or if you spill some contaminated soil), it will grow back!

Fungicides are available to control fairy rings, but they are effective for only about 60 days, after which the fungus starts growing again.

The most practical method of dealing with a fairy ring is hiding it. First, rake off and dispose of the mushrooms associated with the ring. Some mushrooms found in fairy rings are poisonous so be sure to wash your hands when you are done.

Next, increase the vigor of the surrounding grass to blend in with the fairy ring. During the growing season, fertilize the lawn to make it greener. In western Washington, four applications of fertilizer are recommended: one in late November or early December; one in mid-April; one in mid-June (unless you are letting your grass die down in the summer); and one in the beginning of September.

To prevent the grass in the older parts of the fairy ring from dying, rake and loosen the soil. You might need to aerate it by punching holes in the ground with a spading fork or by using a lawn aerator. To help water penetrate the soil more easily, apply a wetting agent, such as soapy water (using about a teaspoon of dishwashing detergent to a gallon of water). Soak the area with water each day for about a month, making sure the water penetrates deeply into the root zone.

Fairy rings may be unsightly but do not cause serious injury to your lawn. Therefore, most gardeners decide to hide them. That way, at least, the fairies don't know where to gather!