

Stinkhorn Fungi

An Unwelcome Garden Sprout

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We've been getting a lot of calls at Pasco Extension about a very smelly garden growth. When it is warm enough for us to be outside, we

are assaulted by this foul-smelling garden fungus. If your garden is starting to smell like a dirty diaper left in the sun, read on!

Sometimes called the octopus fungus because of the arm-like growths or more commonly the stinkhorn fungus for obvious reasons, these smelly growths have been popping up all over this winter.

The fungi are developing a reproductive part that produces a sickening odor. Why doesn't it smell great like a rose? Many flowers are pollinated by bees but this plant is designed to attract pollinating flies.

Reproducing in the winter, especially when it is wet, these stinky fungi have been more common this winter with the frequent rains brought on by the El Nino weather pattern.

Sometimes pink or orange, the stinkhorn smells like feces or carrion. Before springing up in the garden, they grew unobserved in the ground for weeks, months, even years before sending up the reproductive part when conditions are

optimal. While unobserved underground, stinkhorns live on decaying or decomposing material such as dead wood or leaf matter. Now don't start pulling up all your wood mulch! Even without mulch some report that there are millions of fungi living in each square foot of soil, and most of the decaying material is there naturally. So if you take out your mulch, it's unlikely you'll be getting rid of this fungi.

Stinkhorns are more of a nuisance than a pest. Since we can't eliminate them (sorry no chemical control exists), you can "pick" them before they sprout by kicking them over when they are small. Just before shooting up and developing that distinctive smell, fungi are in a non-smelly "egg" stage, a small white mass that forms at ground level.

Another alternative that may have some effect is to install a "living" mulch or groundcover rather than have wood mulch in the garden. Jessamine, lirioppe, perennial peanut, and other groundcovers may help reduce the decomposing wood that stinkhorns like to live on.

Avoid using bleach or other toxic chemicals. They are often ineffective and can harm animals and contaminate soil. You can always pick the mushroom and throw it away so the spores don't spread in the landscape. The only silver lining is that these fungi do represent beneficial organisms in the soil profile. If you can't bring yourself to thank them, at least try to tolerate them.

From UF/IFAS



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