Don’t eat the yard mushrooms

One does not have to drive far to see mushrooms popping up in yards.

Hot temperatures along with abundant moisture have made this a great year for yard mushrooms. Some mushrooms are in a circular pattern, often called fairy rings, and others have no pattern, but are random single mushrooms.

The ring of mushrooms can be quite impressive, with some rings as small as a foot in diameter and others larger than 10 feet. Rings may be formed by over 60 different species of mushrooms. The common species seen this year include meadow, parasol, and puff balls.

The meadow mushroom is one of the most common yard fungi seen in late summer. Its cap will be mainly white but can appear to be grayish in color. The caps are 2 to 4 inches in diameter and will be slightly curved to nearly flat. Underneath the cap, tissue called the gills will be light pink initially, turning dark brown as it matures.

Parasol mushrooms, such as the green-spored species, are another white fungi that can be found in the yard. In general, they are a large mushroom with caps that can be as wide as a foot in diameter and also stand a foot tall.

The cap starts out more or less round (ball-like) and is 2 to 4 inches in diameter, eventually expanding until it is nearly flat. The cap is dry and white, and has brownish patches that develop into scales, especially near the center of the cap.

Another white mushroom that has been seen this year is puffballs. As the name implies, they are ball-shaped and made of soft spongy-like material. I like the term, giant marshmallows.

Puffballs may be as small as a baseball or larger than a basketball. They do not have a stalk or stem like other yard mushrooms, but appear as white spheres in the grass or woods.

The outer layer of the puffball will turn brown as it matures and will form trillions of spores inside. When the mature ball is ruptured it will release a cloud of spores, giving it the name puffball.

Some of the yard mushrooms are edible, but for every edible mushroom there is a look-alike that is highly poisonous. I would discourage anyone from eating yard mushrooms. A person may want to remove the mushrooms when they appear if they have a small child or pet that likes to pick up strange things and eat them.

Unfortunately, some people have believed some folklore about sorting edible from poisonous mushrooms, and the internet has provided a forum for these false statements. Some of these false statements include:

- Poisonous mushrooms will tarnish a silver spoon.
- If it peels, you can eat it.
- All mushrooms growing on wood are edible.
- Mushrooms that squirrels or other animals eat are safe for people.
- All mushrooms in meadows and pastures are safe to eat.
- All white mushrooms are safe.
- Poisonous mushrooms can be detoxified by parboiling, drying, or picking.

I would play it safe and avoid eating yard mushrooms. Stick to the commercially-grown mushrooms found in the grocery store for your favorite salads and sautéed recipes.

Before I close, I want to go back to fairy rings. The ring of mushrooms is quite visible to the homeowner at this time, but what is not evident is the extensive fungal root system under the soil surface, called mycelia.

These mycelia may form future turf rings or dark green or brown grass without the presence of mushrooms.

The mycelia does not directly feed on grass but breaks down thatch from dead grass material, and other soil organic matter. As the organic matter is consumed, nutrients, such as nitrogen, are released and cause the grassy area (the ring) to be a darker green.

The other organic matter may be tree stumps and old tree roots remaining in the soil, or buried organic material such as boards and logs. If the mycelium is dense, it may interfere with water movement, causing a brown ring to form, which is the result of grass in that area going dormant sooner from dry weather stress.

Fairy rings may continue for several years until the organic source is consumed. The area where a ring may occur often moves further out several inches or feet each year from the original ring. Generally, the rings are a cosmetic concern that go away with normal fertilization and adequate rainfall.

There is no practical way to get rid of or prevent a ring from forming in future years. I would suggest enjoying it as one of nature’s surprises for the curious.

Or, as folklore would say, you may enter the ring on a moonlit night and be transported to another world to dance with the fairies.

Check out the following sites for more detailed information and images for yard mushrooms and fairy rings:

https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/HYG-3303
https://plantpathology.ca.uky.edu/files/ppfs-gcm-14.pdf
https://byg.osu.edu/node/448
https://byg.osu.edu/index.php/node/562

Lentz is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources for the Ohio State University Extension Service in Hancock County. He can be reached at 419-422-3851 or via email at lentz.38@osu.edu.

Lentz can be heard with Vaun Wickerham on weekdays at 6:35 a.m. on WPIN, at 5:43 a.m. on WKXK-FM, and at 5:28 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.