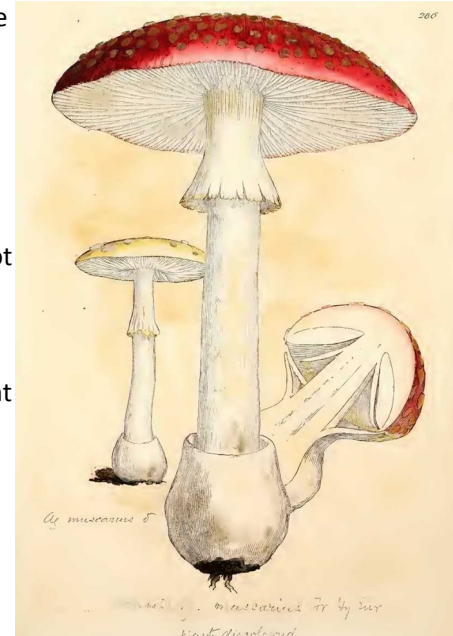


## There is Fungus Among Us!

Published 7/9/19 – Public domain drawing titled “*Amanita muscaria*” from “*Coloured Figures of English Fungi or Mushrooms*” by James Sowerby (1809).

A few weeks ago I mentioned that we live in a mid- to tall-grass prairie and Mother Nature is always trying to return us to that system. Well apparently she's also trying to turn us into the southeastern US with the regular rains and humidity we've been getting. With the extra moisture the stage is set for fungal problems to appear.

So far this year I've seen anthracnose, black spot, botrytis, downy mildew, fusarium wilt (I think), needlecast, rust, and shot hole. I'm not sure how many other fungus disease types there are but what I've seen in just a couple of months is a lot. There are quite a few fungicides available, and as always if you do use one follow the label instructions. Fungicides cannot cure a diseased spot but it will prevent new ones from forming. Look for fungicides that have active ingredients of chlorothalonil, copper sulfate, sulfur, propiconazole, ethanethiol (captan), boscalid, or pyraclostrobin. Some of these products can be used as a preventative, some are mixed with insecticides for treating both fungal and insect infestations. Almost without exception, any fungicide must cover all surfaces of the entire affected area meaning both tops and bottoms of leaves need to be covered.



However cultural practices can reduce the severity of, and sometimes even eliminate, fungal infections entirely. Planting the right plant in the right location is always the first step. Leaving enough space between plants is just as important. Most fungal diseases prefer warm, wet conditions so anything that allows better air flow between and within plants or that puts less moisture on plant leaves helps prevent infections. Avoid overhead watering or allowing sprinklers to hit foliage. Watering in the morning so the leaves can dry quickly during the day is better than late afternoon or evening watering when cooler temperatures let the water stay around longer. Thinning plants, removing extra interior growth especially on fruit bearing trees, and removing lower leaves and limbs allows for better air flow and therefore better drying conditions.

Fungus and fungal spores are quite commonly carried on diseased leaves or fall to the ground below infected plants. That makes collecting fallen leaves and other debris from under plants important. Do not compost leaves suspected of having fungal infections as this will only help spread the disease. Instead either bag and put in the garbage or burn the leaves.

Leaves and branches infected with fungus should be cut off and also bagged or burned. Cut back to healthy tissue and sterilize your cutting tool between cuts to prevent accidental distribution of the fungus as you are moving from plant to plant.

Whatever the plant and whichever fungal disease is present, it is always best to identify and treat as soon as you can. The longer a fungal disease is on a plant the more stress the plant is under, and the easier it is for another insect or disease to come along and further worsen the situation.

Art Smith is a co-owner of East Pierre Landscape and Garden Center, 5400 SD Hwy 34, Pierre