

HOME

YOUR

There's a Fungus Among Us

Coughing? Wheezing?

Experiencing flulike symptoms? The damp winter (and all of 2003, for that matter) has kept many of us feeling under the weather of late, but the damp conditions may be fueling a mold invasion in our own homes causing us to feel sick. If left unchecked, mold spores can wreak havoc with your family's health and your house's structural integrity.

"We all have mold in our homes," says Jerry Misner Sr., business administrator with Grangeville Environmental Services, a remediation contractor based in Hanover, Pa. "The issue is whether these spores find a habitable place to grow in your home."

The increased moisture much of the country saw in 2003, paired with manmade circumstances, such as increased construction, added insult to injury. "The environment is changing," Misner says. "We're taking away more land and changing the ecosystem. Global warming is changing the seasons, and humidity creates real opportunity for mold." Toxicologists and physicians are becoming more educated on the effects of indoor allergens on human health as well.

Remediation contractors are usually called in for health-related issues. Only then do clients become aware of the extent of structural damage, Misner says. Contaminated wall-, flake- or particleboard, insulation and even framing can be damaged. GES has seen remediation cost as little as \$200 and as much as \$20,000, depending on the extent of the damage.



"Controlling moisture is the best key to prevention," says Richard Myers, GES's field services coordinator. Moisture sources include a leaky roof, foundation, clogged gutters or pipe breaks in walls that go unnoticed. "Once it's finally visible, you've got a real issue," he says. "Taking a proactive stance now can save a lot of money in the future."

Homeowners can combat potential problems by cleaning problem areas with a disinfectant. Although a mixture of bleach and water works well, it can be toxic and difficult to use properly. Nontoxic cleaners are making their way into the market, however. "The key is to follow the directions," Myers says.

Other minor problems can be dealt with by do-it-yourselfers. Simply tearing down drywall and replacing it can spread mold spores to other, noncontaminated areas of your home, but information on how to do it properly is readily available.

If you're buying a home, make sure your home inspector is trained to identify mold. And if you're selling your home, talk with your agent about mold inspections and proper disclosure.

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Has Spring Sprung in Your Yard?

As the days get longer and the ground thaws, it's tempting for many homeowners to express their authority over their lawns and garden. Here are some tips on how to satisfy the outdoor urge and get a jump on your gardening.

Avoid cleaning up your flowerbeds. Stray leaves and mulch act as a buffer to emerging bulbs against the cold snaps that are likely to come as spring makes its full debut.

- Never work with wet soil. Walking on wet ground will compact the soil and suffocate the roots beneath.
- To satisfy the urge to dig, put your efforts into the compost pile. Add leaves and soil to keep it nutrient-rich.
- Prune trees by the end of March, before the leaves come out and the sap starts to run.
- Lightly rake the lawn. It will look better (by ridding it of snow mold, weed grasses — caused by too much water exposure — and dead patches) and help you to assess the extent of any damage.
- Apply a lawn fertilizer at half the recommended dose. One month later, apply a full dosage. Avoid applying too much nitrogen in early spring, however, or you will spend most of your summer mowing!

Source: *Daisy Moore, garden designer and horticultural consultant.* Visit www.daisymoore.com for more information.

SPRING Maintenance Tips

Spring is here, and warmer weather is just around the corner. It's also a time that traditionally results in wide fluctuations in temperature and weather conditions. By following these tips, you can ensure that your house is water-resistant and ready for almost anything Mother Nature has in store.

- Clean and secure the eaves, trough and downspouts.
- Fill cracks in the foundation or basement walls.
- Extend the downspouts so that water drains away from the home.
- Check that the sump pit and the sump pump are clean and operable.
- If you don't have a sump pump, make sure the floor drain is clean and unencumbered.
- Inspect your roof for loose shingles.
- Clean the window wells of debris.
- Change the furnace filter.
- Test your smoke detectors and install new batteries regularly.
- Clean electric baseboard heaters.
- Have a qualified technician check your furnace, air conditioner and heat pump.



Do you know someone who is thinking about buying or selling a home? Please mention my name.

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Peggy Johnston

Peggy Johnston CRS, GRI
Associate Broker

9 McCullough Place
Rye, NY 10580

Office: 914-967-0059 ext. 129

Cell: 914-494-9110

Fax: 914-967-8259

Email: info@peggyjohnston.com

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