

Is That Really What It's Called?

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Every once in a great while, a storytelling opportunity comes along that I just can't ignore. Sunday morning was one of those opportunities.

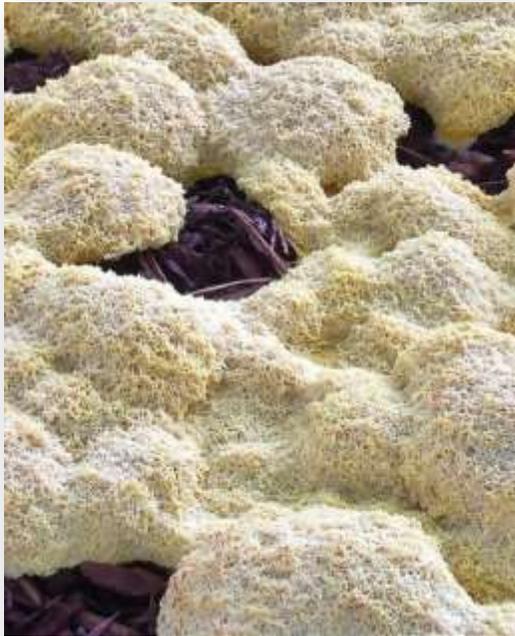
My wife Sabine and I had gone out for a walk. Rounding the front of our house we passed under the canopy of an apple tree grove in our front yard, at which point Sabine pointed at something on top of the mulch and declared, "OK, that's just gross. Some dog puked in our garden." I promised to clean it up when we got back.



Fuligo Septica, otherwise known as dog vomit slime mold. You can just make out a second colony on the trunk of the tree in the extreme upper left corner of the photo.

When we *did* get back, I grabbed a shovel to take care of the offensive pile of yellow slime under the apple tree, but when I got out there I stopped dead in my tracks. Why? Because it was bigger, it was taller, and I kid you not, I *swear* it had moved closer to the apple tree. In fact, there was a blob of the yellow stuff on the side of one of the trees. Clearly this was not something that

came out of the northbound end of a southbound retching dog. It looked kind of like a fungus, but not really.



A close up photograph of the slime mold in my front yard.

So for the moment, I decided to leave it where it was. I went inside and, grabbing my iPad, searched for “yellow fungus on mulch.” I was almost instantly rewarded with a photograph of my invader - *Fuligo septica*, otherwise known as Dog Vomit Slime Mold.

This stuff is fascinating. Let’s start with slime molds in general. They fall into a category called myxomycetes, which comes from two Greek words meaning “mucus fungus.” That’s not much better than dog vomit. Anyway, the really interesting thing about slime molds is that they pass through a development phase called plasmodium, during which they grow rapidly to enormous size. But here’s the interesting part: The plasmodium is a single cell with millions of nuclei that can weigh as much 45 pounds!

Here’s the other interesting thing about slime molds. *They move. As in, they crawl.* And how fast, you ask? Brace yourself: about an eighth of a mile per hour. That means that ... never mind. You don’t want to go to sleep thinking about that. Just be sure to lock the door.

I know that the vast majority of you couldn’t care less about slime molds, especially those that have vomit and mucus in their names. But you do have to admit that this is kind of interesting and that the multi-step research I had to do to figure out what this thing in my yard was yielded a good story.

All I can say is that I feel like Egon Spengler in the Ghostbusters: “I collect spores, molds and fungus.”

Thanks for reading.