

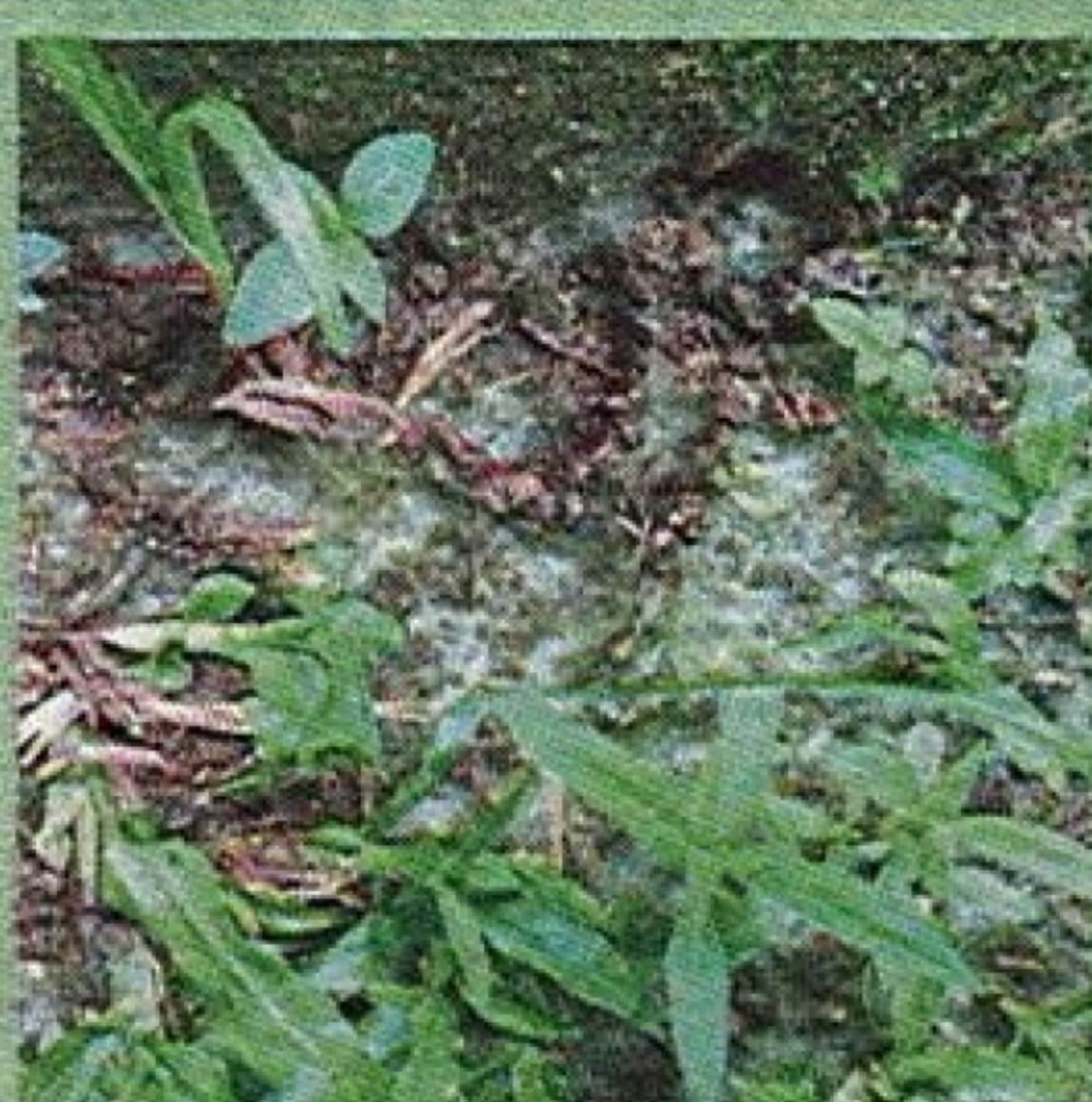
All questions are answered by Dr Christopher Teh, soil biologist and senior lecturer at Universiti Putra Malaysia.



Dear Plant Doctor

If you have any edible gardening questions, fill in the form at the following website:

questions.eatsshootsandroots.com



Q I HAVE noticed large patches of greyish green mould/lichen growing randomly on the ground among the grass in my backyard (see photos above). The affected area seems to be increasing during this cloudy and rainy spell. Is it harmful to my plants and how do I get rid of it?

– Suraya

A THESE are patches of mould or fungus. They often indicate a healthy soil, but too much can indicate very wet soil and humid conditions. I would not worry if they appear in small patches but if you find them unsightly, you can let more sunlight into the area by clearing the area enough to reduce the shade; or simply water less.

Q THE lemon tree in my garden is about four years old and has grown to a good height, yet it has not produced any fruits. Why is this so? – N.Vasanthi

A LEMON trees need to be pruned for healthier growth, or if you have been pruning, you might have pruned too much. Prune the tree to have a good height and shape. Remove upright, tangled, congested, and low-lying branches, so you have at the end branches that are more uniformly spaced. Lemon trees are heavy feeders of nitrogen (N) and potassium (K), so you should fertilise your tree with more N and K.

Q I HAVE a lemon tree that I bought three years ago, and it has been growing in the ground, but it's not bearing fruits or flowers. How do you get it to bear fruits? I have been diligently fertilising once a month but fruits don't appear. – Gabriel

A YOU are either over-watering or over-fertilizing your tree. Giving too much water or fertiliser may result in good tree growth but yield no fruits. Even if flowers do form, they would abort (drop off), causing no fruits.

Fertilisation should only be done three times a year, not every month. Follow the recommendation on the fertiliser bag as different fertilisers have different formulations or nutrient rates.

I suggest you stop all fertilisers until you start to get a good harvest of fruits. Also, water only when the top 15cm of soil is dry.

Q THE leave tips of my indoor plants have recently turned brownish. I can also see the browning on young leaves just sprouting. The plants are mostly in shade with some sunlight in the car porch. I would like to know how I could improve the situation. – Elaine

A BROWN leaf tips can be a challenge to diagnose because they can be caused by under- or over-watering, excessive fertilisation (causing leaf burns), or problems with the roots.

Closely examine the soil of the affected plants, especially the bottom of the soil. If it is very dry, it is under-watered and you have to water more. If it's dripping wet, stop watering until the excess water drains out; reduce your watering frequency.

Also check the roots. If they appear rotted (including a foul smell), it means the roots have rotted due to over-watering. In this case, these roots are a lost cause and the best is to hope the new roots will be able to grow and the plant recover.

If you have over-watered or the roots have rotted; you may have to change the soil. Try a more free-draining soil so excess water is able to drain out more easily.