Controlling Moss on Roofs

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Moss is a simple form of plant growth that thrives in damp, shaded locations. It is likely to be found on the north slopes of roofs and roofs shaded by overhanging trees.

Control measures include removal of overhanging branches, scraping away as much moss as possible, and spraying the area with chemical. Spraying is most effective when the moss is actively growing, and when rain is not likely for several days. Moss grows vigorously during the rainy seasons—fall, winter, and spring. Very little growth occurs during the summer.

Recommended Materials

Coppers

Some proprietary copper formulations are used for moss control. Follow manufacturer's directions.

Copper sulfate (blue stone)

Copper sulfate is effective when sprayed on moss at the rate of ¼ to ½ ounce per 10 gallons of water. It is corrosive to metal eave troughs, downspouts, and metal spray equipment. They should be washed thoroughly with water immediately after treatment. Copper sulfate solution has a good residual effect, depending on type of roof, amount of penetration, and amount of rainfall.

Zinc galvanized or copper flashings and ridges

A galvanized or copper ridge will be effective for about 10 to 15 feet down from the ridge on most roofs. Normal corrosion from bare copper wires, stretched about every 10 feet horizontally along the butt ends of shingles, will provide some moss control.

Zinc chloride (zinc as metallic 29.6 percent solution)

Mix 1 pint zinc chloride in 3 gallons of water. Apply at the rate of 3 gallons of mixture to 100 square feet of moss area. Apply by sprinkling can, hose-end, tank sprayer. Thoroughly soak moss but avoid runoff. Zinc chloride is corrosive to metals and injurious to plants. Follow manufacturer's directions.

Zinc sulfate monohydrate (metallic zinc 36 percent solution)

Mix 3 pounds of powder in 5 to 10 gallons of water and apply to 600 square feet of moss area. Apply by sprinkling can, hose-end, or tank sprayer. Thoroughly soak moss but avoid runoff. Do not apply if building has copper gutters or downspouts as corrosion may occur.

Table salt

Spray the surface of moss with a 10 or 20 percent solution or sprinkle dry table salt when moss is wet. Table salt does not have a residual effect, and is not as effective as some other materials. Table salt is also corrosive to metals and injurious to plants.

Sodium pentachlorophenate (Several concentrations of solution available—follow manufacturer's directions.)

Caution: Do not use sodium pentachlorophenate on home roofs. Use on roofs of storage or industrial buildings or sheds. Use only where the sodium pentachlorophenate solution or fumes will not injure plants or make the building uninhabitable. Sodium pentachlorophenate is toxic to plants and can be toxic to humans if used improperly. Follow the manufacturer's directions.

Other weed-killer compounds

Some compounds normally used as weed killers are also effective for moss control. Follow the manufacturer's directions and precautions for use.

Cautions

Use extreme care when applying the materials mentioned above. Keep them away from children and animals and prevent contamination of plants. Be sure that spray does not fall or drift onto plants, and that spray solution is not carried down drainspouts to injure plants in foundation plantings. Use of a sprinkler can for applying solutions may reduce the drift hazard.

Remember that several of the chemicals recommended for control of moss are very corrosive to metal. Be sure gutters and downspouts are clear of debris. After treating the roof thoroughly, flush gutters and drainspouts with fresh water to prevent corrosion and costly replacement. Equipment can be protected by adding 2 tablespoons of household ammonia to 1 gallon of water for the final flushing through the sprayer.

Handle Pesticides Safely

Chemical poisoning statistics compiled by the Oregon Poison Control Registry at the University of Oregon Health Sciences Center indicate that most accidents with pesticides involve misuse, improper storage, and inadequate disposal methods.

It is wise to treat all of these chemicals as poisons—and beware of both dermal (skin) and oral exposures. Take care to avoid spills or contact with skin. Wear rubber gloves. Do not leave these materials unattended while the spraying is underway.

Store pesticides in their original labeled containers out of sight and reach of children or pets. Storage under lock and key is the most foolproof method. It is particularly important to keep these chemicals separate from foods or feed.

Dispose of empty containers safely. When containers are empty, rinse them thoroughly, pour the rinse water into the sprayer, and use the rinse water in the spray program. Empty, rinsed containers can be disposed of in normal disposal methods, including the garbage can.

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