

What Is That Black Stuff On My House That Looks Like Dirt But Won't Go Away?

New residents to Florida often find the “fungus” phenomenon disconcerting and confusing. What you might think looks like dark colored dirt is actually fungus. If you think about it, if it were actually dirt a little water rinse would be all it would take to make it go away. So, if your “dirt” doesn’t go away with rain or rinsing you have algae/fungus/mold growth.

So what exactly is this type of algae/fungus/mold?

The black staining is an algae called *Gloeocapsa Magma*. It is a species of [cyanobacteria](#). Cyanobacteria are an ancient line of photosynthesizing bacteria, which photolyze water generating oxygen gas. This living algae organism thrives in humid and warm climates and usually appears first on the north sides of the home or roof where shade is prevalent and moisture tends to accumulate. The algae are deposited on your roof by wind and/or wildlife. This particular type of cyanobacteria is generally responsible for creating the unattractive black stains and/or streaks on roofs and other parts of your exterior. The bacteria accumulate over time by attaching and feeding on dead organic matter. Underlying dirt build-up can give it a perfect breeding ground to which it will attach. Additionally, porous materials are an easy target for the fungus to breed in as they hold moisture. This accumulation begins to show the black stains as the cyanobacteria develop their dark and hard UV-protective outer coating. Once the bacteria have become noticeable, the stains will continue to worsen year to year. The concern for your home is, that as the algae feeds, it is breaking down the protective surfaces of your home such as paint, mortar and cage coatings. Therefore, removing the algae regularly is important to keep your protective surfaces doing their job and to keep your home from becoming unsightly.

Where and on what will I see algae?

For the exterior of your home, it will grow on and attack nearly anything. The most common and noticeable items are Shingle & Tile Roofs, Pool Cages/Lanais, Exterior Walls, Soffit/Fascia/Gutters, Decking, Driveways, Sheds, Fences, Decorative Rocks, Etc. As it grows on these surfaces it causes the protective coatings to deteriorate prematurely. For shingle and tile it will not only eat away the coatings and granules, but it will diminish the roof’s abilities to reflect heat rays. If not treated, the roof algae will reduce the life of your roof, diminish your home’s curb appeal and increase your home cooling expenses. For cage framework, if left too long, it will have effectively “eaten” off the coating/paint. The same is true for most soffit, fascia and gutters. As to the exterior walls of your home, you will find the paint to be gone and the underlying surface to be exposed. For screens, it will speed up deterioration causing them to become more brittle and you will not get expected life span.

So, what needs to be done about it?

You may hear don't worry about it; it is an aesthetic issue only. That is not true. Since the feeding fungus is breaking down the protective surfaces, it is important it be removed by cleaning on a regular basis. Since the algae are spread via wind and wildlife, you will find it spreads easily from home to home. Because it spreads easily, you will find many Homeowners Associations have policies on regularly cleaning and removing the fungus. The simplest way to address removal of the fungus is by pressure cleaning with proper techniques. Many homeowners can maintain and fend off the growth through their own regular maintenance. It is very important for the homeowner to understand and use proper techniques for care. Otherwise, damage may occur to the protective surfaces from improper pressure or chemical usage. If the fungus binds beyond the scope of the homeowner, a Professional Pressure Cleaning or Power Washing Company can be hired. This is especially true when it comes to your roof surfaces. Your roof is one of the most expensive pieces of your property and you would not want to damage or void your warranty by not following the manufacturer's guidelines. Should you get to the point where you need to hire a professional remember to follow the same guidelines as with any contractor. Make sure they have insurance, worker's compensation and proper licensure. Additionally, ask questions. They should be knowledgeable in cleaning techniques and products. There are ways to clean without harming or covering landscaping and many new "green" options are now available.

This informational article provided by:
HOOVER PRESSURE CLEANING
"The Plant Friendly People"

Phone Numbers by Location:	
Englewood	(941) 460-0280
North Port	(941) 460-0280
Port Charlotte	(941) 743-2882
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Venice	(941) 483-4214
Toll Free	888-697-6886