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Gardeners Guide to:

LAWN MAINTENANCE - CHAFER GRUBS

The 'chafer season' starts in May until the end of August and can have a devastating effect on your lawn. In heavily infested areas the beetles can be seen crawling over or flying up from the turf in large numbers at dusk on warm evenings. After mating, the females burrow back into the turf where they lay their eggs. For this purpose, they are more likely to select a lawn with thatch that provides camouflage from their main predators – birds. Chafer grubs are plump larvae with creamy white bodies, three pairs of legs and light brown heads; their bodies are typically curved like a letter C and can be up to 30mm long depending on the species. There are several species, but the ones encountered in our local soils take two summers before pupating in the subsoil.



Damage to lawns by chafer grubs tends to be most obvious between autumn and spring when the grubs are becoming fully fed. Patches of the lawn become yellowish and may be torn up by birds – generally jays, magpies, crows and rooks which feed voraciously on the grubs. Badgers and foxes also eat the grubs and can disturb large areas of turf overnight.

Damaged infestations can be very localised with neighbouring gardens apparently remaining untouched. Where severe attacks have occurred, the problem may be repeated for several successive years until the population decreases due to predators or disease. Damaged turf can be repaired by seed sowing in appropriate weather conditions or turf laying in the spring.

For many years there has been no effective control but as of August 2006 a chemical control 'Provado Lawn Grub Killer' (imidacloprid) is now available. This is applied once a year in the spring (May/June) during the egg laying period to control the larvae stage as it emerges and starts to feed on the roots. One application lasts all season and also gives control of leatherjackets, that hatch in the autumn and cause similar damage to the lawn. The chemical is applied by watering can at a rate of 30g per 100m² and then watered in gently to wash it down into the root zone where it remains active for up to 6 months. There is no need to exclude pets and children from the lawn once dry, however it is best not to let rabbits or guinea pigs eat the grass for 4 weeks after application.

Some preventative success has been achieved by an application of Armillatox at a dilution rate of 100:1 and an application rate of 10L dilute per 50m². Whilst this does not kill the grubs on contact, the grubs dislike the taste and aroma of the dilution when it has soaked around the grass roots; subsequently the grub dies of starvation.

Biological controls are available in the form of microscopic nematodes or eelworms, which are watered into the turf and are available by special order. just ask at your garden centre for details.

Any steps taken to promote good turf husbandry eg. thatch and moss control, feeding in the autumn and spring, watering in dry spells – will make the lawn less susceptible to infestation and damage.