



Johnson's Garden Talk

Newsletter archives ... for the friends and customers of Johnson's Garden Centers

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Get Ready for Grubworms

Alisa DePontier, Johnson's East Store

If you've ever had grub damage on your lawn, you know the importance of treating before the grubs start munching on the grass roots. Grubs can do a lot of damage very quickly.

To check for grubworms, take a garden shovel and "scalp" a patch of grass from the soil. Go deep enough so that you don't disturb the roots too much. Often, when the grub damage is severe, you can actually lift the sod like tugging on a carpet.

Controlling grubworms can be a little confusing because there is actually more than one type of grub found in our soil. The "bad guy," or the one who wreaks so much havoc on our lawns in the fall, is the Southern Masked Chafer (or annual grub). This grub has a one-year life cycle and the adult looks like a miniature form of the "June Bug" (which does not feed on anything).

Southern Masked Chafer eggs are laid in July and hatch in early August. These grubs do most of their damage to the turf during their peak August to September feeding periods. By mid-October as the soil temperature cools the grubs stop feeding and move down deeper into the soil where they over winter below the frost line.

When the soil warms up the following spring, the grubs move up to the grass root zone where they do minimal feeding (if necessary to complete their development). Mature grubs form an earthen cell from which the Southern Masked Chafer beetle emerges approximately three weeks later to mate and repeat their yearly cycle.

The presence of Southern Masked Chafer grubs in lawns may go unnoticed until late summer or early fall. There may be the appearance of an off-color spot in the lawn. Damaged turf may wilt, turn brown and even die, usually in spots and patches. Affected grass looks very much like drought or brown patch.

A population of three or more grubs per square foot may be enough to justify the use of an insecticide under hot, dry weather conditions. Populations of 8-19 grubs per square foot usually cause severe damage and warrant corrective action.

There are two types of grubworm treatments. You can either apply a preventive such as Merit or you can apply a curative treatment with Diazinon or Dylox.

Think of Merit as insurance against grubs. Merit is a stomach poison that is taken into the root system of the turf and stored there. As the newly hatched grubs begin to feed they are killed. Merit must be applied several weeks (30 days) prior to when the Southern Masked Chafer hatches to allow adequate time for the uptake of the product into the plant. The best time to apply Merit is in late June to early July.

Diazinon and Dylox are "contact" insecticides. In order to achieve good control of Southern Masked Chafer grubs the insecticide should be applied while the grubs are still very tiny and feeding in the upper 2" of the soil. Late July through mid-August applications give the best control. Early application is even more critical when there is a layer of thatch that the insecticide must penetrate to get to the grub zone. A deep watering several days prior to application of Diazinon or Dylox will bring the grubs closer to the soil surface.

It may take from 2-4 weeks for the grubs to begin to die from the insecticide so it's best to treat before you start to see the damage. Otherwise the grubs will continue to feed on your lawn while the product takes effect.

All grub treatments including Merit, Diazinon and Dylox must be followed by several deep waterings of at least 1/2" each.