

Lawn Insects

Contrary to popular belief, insects are not a common cause of residential lawn damage in the Sacramento area. Poor lawn care, especially improper watering and planting inappropriate grass species, are more likely causes of unhealthy or dying lawns. Disease-causing agents, excess or inappropriate use of chemicals such as fertilizer and herbicides, or dog urine also produce lawn damage resembling that of insects. Many insects in the lawn are beneficial. Never apply an insecticide unless a damaging level of a known insect pest is confirmed. Insecticides are only effective if applied at the right time and in the right manner. Some insecticides may kill good bugs too.

How do you know if insects are causing damage?

- ▶ Brown spots in lawns can be caused by over- or under-irrigation, plant disease, improper use of chemicals or dog urine as well as insects
- ▶ Confirm presence of insects before applying an insecticide. For grubs, dig around roots, for other insects perform a drench test. (See reverse.)

Keep your lawn healthy by:

- ▶ Planting grass species that do well in your area
- ▶ Irrigating deeply and infrequently
- ▶ Doing routine maintenance on sprinkler heads
- ▶ Applying only three to six pounds of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet per year when fertilizing
- ▶ Aerating your lawn annually; remove thatch if it exceeds 1/2 inch
- ▶ Cutting only 1/3 –1/2 of grass height at each mowing and keeping lawnmower blades sharp



If a damaging level of insects is confirmed, do the following:

- Choose an insecticide based on the pest you're targeting
- Find out which insecticide ingredients target specific lawn insects:
 - *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) kills only caterpillars, including cutworms, lawn moths and skippers
 - Insect-attacking nematodes control caterpillars or grubs
 - Azadirachtin controls cutworms, armyworms, and larvae of lawn moths
 - Imidacloprid is effective against young lawn grubs
 - Acephate and permethrin are broadly toxic insecticides that kill chinch bugs, lawn moths, and cutworms, but also kill beneficial insects

HOW TO PERFORM A DRENCH TEST

- *Mix three to four tablespoons of dishwashing detergent in two gallons of water*
- *Evenly apply two gallons to one square yard of your lawn*
- *Monitor the area for 10 minutes and count the number of armyworms, cutworms or lawn moth larvae that rise to the surface*
- *Treat the area only if insect numbers exceed five armyworms or cutworms or 15 lawn moths per square yard*



chinch bug



sod webworm larva



cutworm larva



grub larva

Be sure to read product labels carefully and follow all instructions on proper use, storage and disposal of pesticides.

Minimize or avoid the use of products that contain diazinon and chlorpyrifos – these materials are polluting our waterways.

For more information contact the UC Master Gardeners at (916) 875-6913, Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, and 1 - 4p.m., or visit the UCIPM Web site at www.ipm.ucdavis.edu.



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