

Wally's weekly News 17<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2010  
Written by Wally Richards.

## LAWN PESTS

There are 4 insect pests that can damage your lawns, grass grubs, black beetle grubs, porina caterpillars and root nematodes.

Birds will often give you a clue to the presents of three of the above by digging up patches of lawn to expose the grubs or caterpillars for a nice feed. The birds can do a lot of damage as they forge and help remove your problem.

You can also lift sections of your lawn to observe what is under the soil eating at the roots of your grasses. If a number of grubs are found in a square foot then it is worth while to apply a suitable control.

You are likely, after checking several areas of your lawn, to find that certain areas contain the biggest populations and thus reduce the need for treating the whole lawn. Areas which have been a problem in the past and areas where there is light shining at night such as street lights, security lights or light from un-curtained windows are places where the largest populations of grubs are likely to be found.

Root nematodes are very small and often the home gardener will not be aware of them in a lawn area.

The nematodes suck on the roots of the grasses reducing the luster of the grass otherwise not causing the damage and death of grasses that the other 3 pests can do.

You may only come to realise that you had root nematodes a few weeks after applying a control, when you see a greater vigour in your lawn.

The black beetle grubs are generally only found in the North Island and the further north you are the greater the problem.

The adult beetle starts off as a rich chestnut colour, but soon after changes to a glossy black. It is about 15 mm long, with the male usually slightly smaller than the female. The eggs are usually found singly; they are about 2 mm long and ovoid, swelling to an almost spherical shape before hatching. The larvae which are similar to a grass grub larvae, but larger than that of the grass grub, reaching about 2.5 cm when fully grown. The head is light brown, and the body greyish or creamy white except for the hind end which appears black.

The damage done in lawns by black beetle is very similar as damage by grass grub, severe infestations of either grub causes the lawn to brown off, and can be rolled back like a mat owing to the complete destruction of the root system by the larvae. The tubers of potatoes and kumaras are bored into by the black beetle larvae, and the aerial parts are destroyed below ground level by the adult beetles. Black beetle outbreaks are worse with higher than average spring and summer temperatures.

Black beetle has only one generation per year, but it is quite common to find life stages out of phase with the main generation so that all life stages may be found in the soil at any time of the year.

The usual cycle is for adult females to lay 7-10 eggs in the soil from late September, most egg laying occurring from late October to late December. Larvae develop through three instars over the summer and pupate in February-March. New adults begin to emerge from late February and feed actively for a few months. Adults over winter in the soil, emerging in spring to start feeding again and to lay eggs.

Porina caterpillars live in a burrow in the soil and emerge in the early evening to feed on the base of the grasses and other young plants.

It is not uncommon after planting out young seedlings to find that they have been chewed through near the base leaving the tops to wither on the ground. You may notice holes in the soil which are the entrance to their borrows.

There is a very simple treatment for porina and that is to mow your lawn and apply **Neem Tree Oil** as a spray or through a Lawn Boy at the rate of 15mls per litre of warm water applied late in the day.

You are trying to get the oil solution to the base of the grasses where the caterpillars are going to feed.

That evening when they chew on some Neem coated foliage they will stop eating forever and starve to death over the next few days. Unfortunately this surface treatment will not effect grubs and nematodes feasting on the roots. A greater drench of the oil would be needed to get it down into the soil and a stronger solution would be needed.

You could try say 50 mls per litre applied to moist soil through a Lawn Boy or watering can then lightly water the area to force the oil down deeper. A repeat a day or so later with another light watering would likely take the oil deeper still.

Another non-chemical control comes from Australia called **Professor Macs 3 in 1 for Lawns**.

It is a combination of eucalyptus and tea tree oils with an organic plant food and wetting agent.

It comes in a 2 litre container which you snap on the hose; turn on the hose to full pressure and when in place lift the little stopper on the container and the water passing through the applicator sucks up the contents at a ratio of 1:25. The two litres will treat 100 square metres of lawn.

When the container is empty you refill it with water and do the same over the area to force the oils down into the lower root zone. Not harmful to worms as they will go down deeper.

Effective up to about 6 weeks of control dependant on rainfall or watering.

The treatment will clean up all the lawn pests.

The above treatments are safe in regards to children playing on the treated lawn and likewise pets and wild life.

Chemical treatments are not safe and if used, the treated areas should be no go areas for children and pets till such time as the residue toxicity has dissipated.

The best and most toxic chemical treatment for the home gardener goes under the names, Lawn Pest Control or Pyrifos.

It is a granular chemical that is applied at 2 grams per square metre through a Scotts spreader and then watered down. The 500 gram pack treats 250 square metres which makes it good value for the price.

If you don't mind using a chemical and you do not have children or pets to worry about then it is an option for you, otherwise stay with the non harmful controls as previously mentioned.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)

Email [wallyjr@gardenews.co.nz](mailto:wallyjr@gardenews.co.nz)

Web site [www.gardenews.co.nz](http://www.gardenews.co.nz)