

Got Sod Webworms?



By Jeremy Maneol

Have you ever woke up one morning and looked out the window to see areas in the lawn that have the appearance of having been mowed? Well you just became the victim of the sod web worm.



During summer months it is not uncommon to see the little white moths darting about a foot or two above the turf – especially in the shady areas and at night. These lawn moths do No damage to your lawn – Yes they are a nuisance but they absolutely do no damage to the lawn in the adult stage.

But that is only half of the story

The moths are laying eggs, Eggs that hatch out into little caterpillars. These small caterpillars, the larvae stage of the sod webworms, feed on the turf grass blades. Sod webworms can be serious pests of home lawns, sports fields, golf courses and other turf grass areas.

Sod webworms are greenish-brown or gray, and usually have dark spots scattered along the body. In most species, the head capsule of the larger stages of caterpillars will be relatively light brown with some dark markings and are covered with fine hairs.

Sod webworms live in tunnels constructed in turf thatch or extending to the soil under the turf. These tunnels are lined with silk, soil particles and bits of leaves. They emerge from these burrows to chew grass blades off just above the thatch line, usually at night. The most severe damage usually appears in July and August, but I have seen activity all the way through October. Sod webworm damage can be mistaken for heat and drought stress.

If infestation is present, small patches of grass will be chewed off at ground level. Fresh clippings and green fecal pellets, called frass, are also usually present. Larvae, silken tubes and webbing can also be present in the thatch layer and the top inch of soil. In Florida, tropical sod webworms may produce new generations very quickly.

The surest way to tell if you have sod webworms is to find a suspected area of infestation, such as brown patches. Get down and pull back the grass blades in the thatch and look for an area with frass present. This indicates that larvae are close by. The adult moths can fly considerable distances and may be coming from other infested areas.

Fear not, they are easily controlled and do no permanent damage. Affected areas generally recover in a couple of weeks. Although several products are available for purchase at your local home and garden store, it is usually best to contact a professional when dealing with turf damaging insects.

Adults may be visible and active for several days after a pesticide application, but rest assured that the larvae are dining on treated turf. That's bad for sod webworms, but good for your turf!

As always, if we can help, give us a call! 743-8272