

White Grub Control in Turf

Masked Chafers, or “June beetles”, have been flying and laying eggs for 1-2 weeks now. White grubs, the most serious and common turf insect problem in Eastern Nebraska, are the larval form of several types of beetles, the most common being the Masked Chafer. So, if your lawn has a history of grub activity it is time now to put a treatment in place, giving special attention to turf that is nice and green, well watered and cared for, since this is where the beetles prefer to deposit their eggs.

Adult Masked Chafers, a light tan or reddish-tan beetle, about 5/8-inch long with a dark brown head, begin emerging from the soil in late June. They are often seen flying around lights in the evening from late June through July. These adult beetles do not feed on or damage turf at all. Egg-laying by the adult Masked Chafers begins in early July, and these eggs hatch out in late July or early August. The larvae are easily recognized as cream-colored grubs with reddish-brown heads, three pairs of legs, and a habit of curling into a C- form when disturbed. The newly hatched larvae are only about the size of a children’s aspirin, but eventually become fully-grown in late August and are almost the size of a quarter.

If not controlled, grubs overwinter in the soil as a fully-grown larva. Often homeowners see grubs in the soil in early spring and mistakenly treat them with insecticides. However, mature spring larvae do little if any feeding on grass roots, and are relatively difficult to kill. Newly hatched larvae, occurring in late July, are easier to kill making control efforts targeting the young larvae are much more effective.

It’s also important to remember that eight to ten white grubs per square foot of turf are required before significant turf damage is done. One or two grubs in the lawn are normal and do not require treatment.

Currently, the most effective grub control product on the market is Imidacloprid (Merit). This product, which should be applied from approximately June 20-July 15 and watered in after application, provides three months of residual grub control. The homeowner’s goal should be to have this product in place, in the soil, when the new grubs hatch out and begin feeding in late July. The grubs will ingest the insecticide immediately after hatching and be killed before reaching a size at which they can do significant damage to turfgrass roots. If applied according to label directions and with the right timing, Imidacloprid will give up to 95% white grub control.

Read and follow all pesticide label directions before application.