

Insect Pests. (leatherjackets and chafers)



Leatherjackets and Chafer Grubs

These are very damaging insect pests which feast on the root system of your turf and can wipe out an entire green in a very short time indeed. They are actually the larvae of the crane fly, commonly called daddy long legs.

The adult flies lay their eggs in the turf and when they hatch they immediately start to feed on your turf roots. A good early indicator of the problem is increased activity from starlings and crows as these birds love to feast on leatherjackets. Unfortunately they cause a great deal of damage digging them up. However, don't shoot the messenger; we hear of many cases on golf courses and bowling greens where the club targets their attention on reducing the bird population in a mistaken belief that they are the main problem. This is a classic case of tackling the symptoms and not the problem. This can be fatal for the green, as meantime the leatherjackets are destroying the green.

Favourable Conditions for Leatherjackets and Chafers

All types of turf grasses are attacked. Damage can first be seen in autumn and this may persist through a mild winter. It is in spring however, when the most severe outbreaks take place.

The grubs will be active at any time the soil is moist and relatively warm. Mild spells in winter are a favourite time for attack. The grubs seem to prefer light, well drained soils.

What can be done?

Follow the checklist items in the left panel to minimize the chances of your green being affected. The main controls are as follows:

Cultural Practices: keeping thatch under control will reduce the likelihood of a major outbreak, as will an intensive winter aeration program, of spiking and solid tining. Regular scarification through the summer months will keep thatch levels under control and disrupt egg laying activity by the adult flies to some degree.

Chemical Control: short lived chemical controls are still available, and can be used to good effect during a severe outbreak. Although insecticides are a crucial part of your approach, you should be following a program that steadily improves the health of your green and so limit your green's susceptibility to attack. Over reliance on chemical control can severely limit your chances of success in achieving this.

John Quinn, Master Greenkeeper

Insect Management Checklist	
Control Thatch	✓
Intensive Winter Aeration	✓
Control Compaction	✓
Maintain Sward Density	✓
Sarrell Rolling	✓
Set Pest Thresholds	✓
Watch for early signs	✓
Chemical Control	✓

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