

## Caterpillars In Turf

We are seeing damage from caterpillars in lawns at this time. A few of our culprits are both sod webworms and armyworms. Armyworms include fall armyworm and yellow-striped armyworms. The worm is actually a moth commonly referred to as 'lawn moths.' Moths are insects that have a complete lifecycle. This means they start as an egg, hatch as a caterpillar (larvae), then pupate (pupa) into adult moths. They over winter as caterpillars and resume feeding in the spring. Next, they pupate into adults. The adult moths lay eggs and hatch into caterpillars which feed again in late July and August.

A key diagnostic feature of caterpillar damage is noted by chewing marks on the grass blades. These thin, dead areas of turf also resemble drought stress and disease. When you see this evidence, mix 2 gallons of tap water with a few tablespoons of dishwashing detergent. Sprinkle this solution over one square yard on the margin of the affected turf. The soap will disturb the worms making them rise to the surface.

Additionally, a more rapid decline of the turf is evidence of caterpillar damage as disease takes longer to spread. Caterpillar damage begins as small brown patches, but as feeding continues, the patches enlarge. Most severe damage occurs in late July and August. The best identification is to find the caterpillars. If you do not see them, the next best identification is seeing the chewing damage on the turf blade. Chinch bugs have a piercing/sucking mouthpart in contrast to the chewing mouthparts of caterpillars. Chinch bugs do not defoliate the grass.

Our best control method is an insecticide treatment. Various pyrethroids will provide control of these caterpillars. These include active ingredients of bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, cypermethrin, permethrin, etc. Look for these names under "active ingredients" on insecticide bottles. There are various trade names for each of these.

Sevin and Dipel can also be used for control measures. Dipel is a formulation of the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* which falls under the category of biological control. For all pesticide use, make sure to follow the label directions. The label will tell you the rates to apply other safety information. Store the products in their original labeled containers out of the reach of children and pets.

UGA Extension Entomologist Dr. Will Hudson says Thomasville will see caterpillar pests through the end of September. Once a lawn is treated, it may be difficult to find dead worms. This is because the organic matter present in the turf carries many microbial bacteria and fungus that quickly breaks down the body of the insects.

Information from this article was taken from "Sod Webworms in Home Lawns" through Penn State Extension and the Georgia Pest Management Handbook.

For additional information, contact the Thomas County Extension Office at 225-4130.