

SOD WEBWORM CONTROL IN LAWNS

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The sod webworm can be a destructive pest of many grasses commonly used for both home lawns and forage production. Sod webworms are the larval or worm stages of lawn moths. The adult moths are small and vary in color from white to shades of gray. While resting, the wings of the adult moth usually are closely folded about the body. A noticeable snout-like projection is present on the front of the head. Moth activity is most apparent during the early evening hours when they can be seen fluttering above lawns, dropping eggs into the turf.

The slender larval form of the sod webworm may reach three-fourths of an inch in length, and is characterized by a light brown color with several rows of dark spots along the entire length of the body.



**Sod webworm
(larval stage)**

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**Sod webworm moth
(adult stage)**

Life History

Sod webworms spend the winter months as partially-grown larvae, several inches below the soil surface. During spring, the larvae mature and transform into the adult moth stage. After mating, the moths deposit eggs that hatch in about one week. The young, developing larvae may feed for one to two weeks before transformation to the pupal and adult stages. Two or three generations may be completed within a year.

Damage

Sod webworm larvae feed primarily at night and prefer areas in lawns that are hot and dry during daylight hours. As a result, steep slopes, banks

and other areas difficult to water properly are subject to larval damage. Heavily shaded areas are seldom attacked by the larvae.

During the summer months, sod webworm larvae live on the soil surface in silken tunnels constructed in the thatch of the grass. Lawn damage occurs as the larvae chew off grass blades and retreat into their protective silken tunnels to consume the foliage. Injury first appears as small brown patches of closely clipped grass. Lawns are particularly susceptible to larval damage during the months of July and August when the temperatures are hot and lawns are not growing vigorously. Large lawn areas may be damaged rapidly if controls are not applied.

Control Measures

The need for sod webworm control can be determined by close examination of the grass and thatch. If three to four sod webworm larvae are found within a 6-inch-square section of dying sod, then chemical treatment is recommended. Larvae are most active on cloudy days or at night.

Insecticides can be applied in either spray or granular form. Spray solutions can be applied with a garden hose sprayer or compressed air sprayer. Apply at least 15 to 25 gallons of insecticide-water solution to 1,000 square feet of grass. Watering the

lawn before application will aid penetration into the turf.

Granular insecticides are easier to use and generally provide more thorough coverage. This type of insecticide can be applied with a fertilizer spreader. Following application, the lawn should be watered for about an hour to wash the granules into the matted turf. Use insecticides containing trichlorfon (Dylox[®]), propoxur (Baygon[®]), carbaryl (Sevin[®]), diazinon or chlorpyrifos (Dursban[®]). Consult the directions given on the insecticide container label to determine the approved rate of insecticide application.

Precautions

Children and pets should be kept off treated turf until insecticide has been watered and turf has dried. Follow directions on insecticide labels and observe all safety precautions. Pesticides should be stored out of reach of children and pets.

Suggested pesticides must be registered and labeled for use by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Department of Agriculture. The status of pesticide label clearances is subject to change, and may have changed since this publication was printed. County Extension agents and appropriate specialists are advised of changes as they occur.

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