Guarding Over Grubs

WEATHER PATTERNS LAST YEAR WILL AFFECT GRUB POPULATIONS THIS YEAR

By Larry Aylward, Editor

Grubs can be predictable. They often show up at the same location over and over. But they can also be as unpredictable from year to year as the Dow Jones Industrial Average is from day to day.

“It’s funny how every year is different with grubs,” says Chuck Silcox, Bayer Environmental Science’s product development manager for insecticides in the turf and ornamental markets.

“Every year [superintendents] deal with something new [from grubs].”

Grubs are high on superintendents’ pest priority list.

“Grub control is probably second to crabgrass control in the minds of superintendents,” says John Price, senior technical sales representative in the mid-American region for Dow AgroSciences.

Superintendents in the Midwest, East and parts of the South know the common turfgrass grubs as Japanese beetles, Asiatic garden beetles, European chafer, Green June beetles and Oriental beetles.

How pestering can the beetles be? Last year, Japanese beetle grubs appeared unexpectedly on several golf courses in the late summer because of the drought. The female beetles delayed laying their eggs until they found moist turf to lay them, and the beetles found that moist turf on golf courses. “They laid their eggs as late as early September, and all of the sudden superintendents were dealing with a grub infestation they didn’t typically have that time of year,” Silcox says.

The drought, which affected about half the country last year, will have an impact on grub activity on golf courses throughout the nation this year, experts agree.

The wild card in all of this is how much superintendents irrigated their courses during the drought. If superintendents didn’t irrigate their courses’ fairways during the drought and let them go dormant, they might not have a problem with severe outbreaks. But superintendents who did irrigate may experience infestations of grubs on their courses. “Irrigated turf is
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(Neb.) CC. “When there's cold temperatures and the frost goes deep into
the soil, they seem to be mobile 

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enough to move below it.”

Joe DiPaola, golf market manager
for Syngenta, notes that soil tempera-
tures are much cooler this spring be-
cause of the cold winter, and grub de-
velopment is likely to be delayed.
DiPaola advises superintendents to
monitor soil temperatures and be on
the lookout for outbreaks. (Syngenta
provides a convenient online resource
— www.greencastonline.com — for
doing this, he notes.)

The first grubs of the spring could
be European chafer, which are active
in Northeast states including Massa-
chusetts and Rhode Island as well as
near the shores of the Great Lakes.

“One distinction with the Euro-
pean chafer is that it becomes active
earlier in the spring and stays more
active in fall,” Silcox says. “It's typi-
cally the first grub doing damage in
the spring.”

Vittum says he's concerned about
increased populations of European
chafer this year because of last year's
drought and the fact that European
chafer handle the cold better than
other grubs.

“European chafer favor dry condi-
tions, and we certainly had that last
year [in the Northeast],” Vittum says.
“They're also more cold-tolerant, so
I'm sure they're untouched by the
winter we just had.”

Silcox says the European chafer and
the Oriental beetle have both expanded
their ranges. Silcox adds that he's sur-
prised how fast the Oriental beetle has
expanded its range, noting it has been
discovered as far south as Atlanta.
DiPaola stresses that superintend-
ents need to discover what type of
grubs are intruding on their golf
courses. The type will influence what
kind of insecticides they apply, as well
as application rates.

If you had grubs last year, you'll
probably have them this year, Dow's
Price adds. He advises superintendents
to monitor grubs' flights. When they
fly, which could be around now (early
May), apply an insecticide within a
week, Price says.

Speaking of insecticides, make
sure to apply them appropriately,
Athy suggests.

“Grubs are one of the easiest pests
to control,” he says. “But if you don't
get them, they can be a serious
problem. If you screw up your applica-
tion, they'll eat your course alive, and you
won't know it until it's too late.”

The key is to ensure that the insec-
ticide you're using ends up in the soil,
not in the thatch layer. It can't kill the
grubs if it doesn't reach the soil where
they're feeding.

“Start watering it in as soon as it's
on the plant,” Athy says. “Then it
doesn't have the opportunity to dry
on the leaves.”

Superintendents also have to
know how long to irrigate after the
application. “Some think a 15- or
20-minute set will get it down
through the thatch, but it might take
longer than that,” Athy adds.

Another key in dealing with grubs:
Don't be in a hurry to treat them
without doing an adequate site survey.
Eileen Buss, an assistant professor
with the University of Florida's entomology
and nematology department, advises
superintendents to step back and estab-
lish the need to treat. That means to es-
ablish how many grubs are in the turf
and to assess the level of damage to the
turf. A healthy stand of turf can survive
as many as 20 grubs per square foot.
For green June beetles, three to five per
square foot merits a spray.

Buss says the newest turfgrass pests
in Florida are sugar cane grubs. “They
are mowing through St. Augustine-
grass,” she says, adding that finding
two to three sugar cane grubs per
square foot would merit a treatment.

Curt Harler, managing editor of
Golfdom's TurfGrass Trends,
contribution to the story.