

Fall Army Worms

This is the time of the year to be on the lookout for Fall Armyworms in lawns. They come from an adult moth which may be blown in or flies in from the coastal areas and lays their eggs in the early spring. The larvae hatch in 5-10 days, then mature in 10-20 days. Three or more generations are produced each year. It is the late September group that produces the large damaging number of larvae (or worms), hence the name “armyworms”.

September and October are the times when you may see problems in your lawn's grass as the worms have now reached adulthood and each can eat many times their weight in grass. The Fall Armyworms are attracted more to Fescue lawns than Bermuda but can be found in both. Therefore, if you have large, brown circular spots in your yard, this could be a warning sign that Fall Armyworms are present, regardless of the type of grass you have. Their damage is mainly cosmetic, although permanent damage may only occur if accompanied with excessive heat and/or drought in the affected area. If the yard has been properly watered over the summer and no significant loss of turf occurred, the grass will likely return.

If you do have areas of brown grass, a close inspection should first be made to determine if these pests are eating your grasses. Proper identification through proper inspection is the best first step against Armyworms. The inspection procedure is simple - mix one ounce of liquid detergent with one gallon of water and apply it to one square yard of the infected area. If present, the Armyworms, as caterpillars, will surface in about 10 minutes and can be found within the blades of grass. If you find 2-4 worms/larvae per square foot or 5-10 worms/larvae or more per square yard, treatment should be started immediately.

Treatment with conventional insecticides is discouraged as this type of application will also kill many beneficial insects as well. These beneficial insects help to rid the yard of these worms and other pests. Instead, organic insecticides should be used, such as Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) or Spinosad. Both have been proven to be highly effective. Always apply as per label directions.