

## Lawn Pests

One of the major battles of summer for many is keeping damaging turf pests at bay. This is because the damage they cause is easily misidentified as drought stress and they are difficult to control. For these reasons, it is often weeks to months before the true nature of the ever expanding brown spots in our lawn is found.

To avoid this problem, proactive, careful observation of brown spots and maintaining lawn health are the best options. Careful observation helps identify potential problems more quickly, and healthy lawns are less attractive to pests. Healthy lawns also recover much more quickly from infestations. Conversely, overly maintained turf, grass that is fertilized and irrigated excessively, is more attractive and has reduced ability to overcome infestations. For basic tips on how to keep the lawn healthy, access the following fact sheet: <http://extension.usu.edu/files/factsheets/care.pdf>.

In northern Utah, there are three common turf pests: various species of sod web worm, bill bugs and white grubs. When damage caused by any of these is first observed, it is often as general thinning and browning of turf in limited areas. Over time, the brown spots expand where visible damage often peaks in late summer or early fall.

Of these pests, sod web worms are the most common. Most sod web worms feed on grass blades and crowns as caterpillars. A separate species called subterranean sod web worm or cranberry girdler causes more severe damage by feeding not only on crowns but also on roots. An indication of infestation of sod web worm is small moths, off-white in color flying about in the lawn in the evening during the summer, especially when disturbed.

White grub and bill bug larvae feed on crowns and roots also. Their larvae are white in color, c-shaped, and often have a brown tented head. White grub larvae also have legs like appendages on their front section.

To differentiate insect damage from drought stress, try pulling on the brown turf, gently but firmly. Pest damaged turf often comes up easily, with few to no roots attached. Additionally, grass damaged by white grubs, bill bug and subterranean sod web worm will often pull back like a rug and larvae are often found under the removed turf. Unfortunately, damage often requires days to weeks to appear and, once it does show, pests are feeding in adjacent green turf.

In situations where damage has occurred for multiple years, use of preventative pesticides is a good option. There are at least three different but effective types available to homeowners. A second preventative application may be needed in late summer, to prevent fall feeding damage from subterranean sod web worm. There are also some products available that control pests if a preventative application was missed. These are often less effective because pests are harder to kill when they are more mature.

Once insects are controlled, lawns that have had severe problems often require reseeding or re-sodding. Otherwise, maintain turf with correct fertilizing and irrigation and it will recover on its own. For more information on specific lawn pests, access the following web page: <https://extension.usu.edu/htm/publications/by=category&category=149>.