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Is Your Lawn a Grub Hub?

Summer and fall should be a great time of year for warm season lawns. Unfortunately, there might be insidious pests right beneath our feet. Beetle larvae are pale, C-shaped worms, called grubs, that often feed on the roots of grass.

The common culprits in Kansas are Southern Masked Chafer and Japanese Beetle. The adults lay eggs in the spring and summer, which hatch and begin to feed on grass roots into the fall. The young grubs do less damage, are easier to treat, and occur earlier in the season. Older grubs, the third instar stage for masked chafer, do more damage but are also less vulnerable to insecticides.

Signs of grub damage in the lawn can include scattered dieback or yellowing with no exact margins. Grub-eaten turf might also feel spongy or lift right up, having lost its root system. The most frustrating sign, however, can be wildlife. Many critters feed on grubs, such as skunks, raccoons, opossums, and moles.

Chemical control options are best done in advance, when the grubs are young and weak. There is one option for controlling established grubs: a chemical called trichlorfon. An application of Dylox, for example, can kill grubs after severe damage is observed. Early control methods utilize active ingredients of chlorantraniliprole (ex. GrubEx) or imidacloprid. Of the listed chemicals, imidacloprid has the highest risk to bees and pollinators, but flowering lawn plants can still carry harmful insecticides.

Most grub control is best when accompanied by watering. Watering the lawn moves the insecticide down into the root zone, while also encouraging grubs to move higher up. Heavy thatch, or grass debris, can reduce the mobility of insecticides and limit control.

If the lawn is looking spotty or the raccoons are digging for gold, the yard may be a hub for grubs. Treating early is best, and scouting can be a lawn saver.

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