



Fact Sheet Fact Sheet Fact Sheet Fact Sheet Fact Sheet

Common Lawn Problems



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Common Lawn Problems

Lawn pests fall into one of four categories:

- weeds or other plants competing with the grass for resources
- insects feeding on the grass
- diseases of the plants
- small animals digging up your grass to feed on insects or plants.

Any of these can be present in your lawn, but only become pests if conditions change to favour their increase.

Prevention is the best approach for managing pests. This includes many of the cultural practices described for the establishment and maintenance of a lawn.

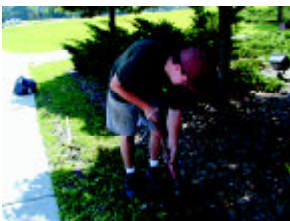
If you keep your lawn healthy using good maintenance practices, you will find that healthy, vigorous, deep-rooted lawns are less susceptible to pest damage and pesticides are usually not required to control pests.

Pest Management

Learn to manage pest problems by following integrated pest management (IPM) principles. IPM puts the emphasis on prevention, looks at all available information and considers all the management options before deciding on the most effective, economical and environmental means of managing a pest problem.

Check the lawn regularly.

➤ Regular inspection of the lawn makes it possible to detect pests and other problems early.



Make sure pest problems are correctly identified.

➤ Beneficial insects may be mistaken for pests.

➤ Plant damage may not be caused by pests.

Plants can be injured by poor growing conditions, or poor maintenance practices, and environmental problems such as road salt or dog urine.

➤ You need to identify the pest in order to look up life cycle and other information that will help you decide if and when to apply treatments and how to prevent further problems.

➤ Your local garden centre may be able to help you in identifying a pest and there are many good sources of information on the web or in reference books.

Once you've found and identified a pest in your lawn, check for damage and decide whether action is necessary.

➤ The presence of a few weeds or insect pests in healthy lawns may not be cause for concern.

➤ Keep an eye on the pest problem and get more information if necessary before deciding whether or not a treatment is needed, and if so, how and when to apply it.

Recurring pest problems are often a sign that lawn care practices need to change.

- Examine your lawn care program and the lawn condition to see if anything needs to be done differently.
- Improving the management of lawns gives long-lasting results and avoids future pest problems.

Weeds

Healthy lawns are less susceptible to weed problems.

- They smother weeds and also prevent their seeds from germinating.

Before resorting to herbicides, try managing weeds by improving the general condition of the lawn as well as the occasional hand weeding.

- Hand weeding can be important if you have sensitive plants or a vegetable garden and there is concern about spray drift.



Developing a certain level of tolerance for some weeds in your yard is a no-cost, no-effort alternative to weed control.

Weeds have more potential to be a problem in a newly-seeded lawn that has not yet established a vigorous stand. Good planning and soil preparation will minimize weed problems and promote quick establishment of the lawn.

Insects

In a healthy lawn, beneficial insects can keep pest insects in check. See *Lawn Ecology* for more on beneficial insects.

Ants are sometimes considered pests as they may make unwanted mounds (ant hills) in an obvious area in your lawn. They do not attack the grass.

Some common insect pests found in home lawns include:

- chinch bugs
- white grubs
- sod webworms

Be aware of the conditions they like so that you can better prevent their establishment.

- Chinch bug damage is more likely to be found in a lawn that suffers from dry conditions or that has excessive thatch.
- The adult beetle that is the source of the white grub infestations prefers laying eggs in short grass.
- Sod webworms are more of a problem on closely cut lawns.

For further information about managing some of these pests, see the PMRA Pest Notes:

Effective Control of Ants

Effective Control of Chinch Bugs

Effective Control of White Grubs

Diseases

Lawn diseases can be difficult to identify and are often confused with other non-disease problems such as poor growing conditions, damage from fertilizer burn, dog urine or road salt.

Some of the diseases that may occasionally affect your lawn include powdery mildew, pythium blight, fusarium blight, dollar spot and brown patch.

Good mowing and watering practices, as well as balanced fertilization, with adequate potassium levels and not too much nitrogen, help in preventing lawn diseases.

If you're not sure about what action to take for a specific problem, call your local lawn care company for help.

Fairy Rings

Fairy Rings are circular or semicircular patches of dead grass with an inner green ring. These usually appear in lawns 5–15 years old and can be caused by a number of different fungi. The fungus feeds on the thatch and the ring grows outward. The fungus is not toxic to the grass, but it prevents water from penetrating into the grass root area causing the grass to die and allowing that area to become infested with weeds.

Repeated spiking with a garden fork (just outside the dead ring), soaking with soapy water and frequent watering to increase moisture can slow the ring's development. Re-seed or re-sod the dead areas.

Animals

Moles and Voles (field mice)

Small animals like moles and voles can tunnel in your lawn in search of food. They prefer lawns infested with thick rooted plants such as dandelions and thistles.

You can help prevent problems with animal pests by eliminating potential food sources around the yard.

For further information, see the PMRA Pest note: *Effective Control of Moles and Voles (Field Mice)*

Racoons and Skunks

Racoons and skunks are generally digging up your lawn for white grubs and other insects. Once you've managed those pests, they should not bother your lawn.

Letting Someone Else Maintain Your Lawn

If you prefer to let an expert take care of your lawn, find out what type of services the companies in your area offer and the results you can expect.

- There is a wide range of services available for lawn maintenance and pest control. These may include services marketed as ‘Integrated Pest Management’, ‘Plant Health Care’, ‘Organic’, and ‘Pesticide-free’ programs.
- Find out what lawn care practices the companies include with their programs and choose the one that is right for you.
- Avoid lawn care programs that regularly apply pesticides whether or not pests are present.

If any pesticides are used, make sure that they are used as part of an IPM Program.

Pesticide Use

Pesticides include herbicides for weeds, insecticides for insects, and fungicides for diseases. They have specific use instructions for certain species and conditions that are described on the product label and must be followed. Most lawn pesticides do not prevent pest problems. They only control pests once they are present.

Before Purchasing a Pesticide Product

- Identify the pest correctly.
- Use physical control methods.
- Read the label directions and safety precautions. The label must include the name of the pest and the treatment location (e.g., lawn or turf).
- Purchase only the quantity of product needed for the treatment.

If you use a pesticide

Always read and follow all label directions and precautions for:

- preparation
- handling
- application
- storage and disposal

Only apply it when and where the pest is present.

Minimize the use of pesticides by:

- timing applications correctly to avoid the need for repeat treatments;
- using spot treatments rather than broadcast applications; and
- only treating the problem area or plants.