

WATCH FOR FALL ARMYWORM

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A lawn pest to be on the lookout for is fall armyworm. This is not a frequent pest but once in a while we see large numbers damage lawns. This insect has been causing damage in southern states and moths and egg masses have been found in the Lincoln and Omaha area.

Since there are many types of moths in the landscape and different types of armyworm, it is important to know what fall armyworm looks like and to watch for it in lawns and landscape.

Insecticides should not be applied to lawns unless fall armyworm is positively identified. Avoiding the use of insecticides unless their use is justified helps reduce resistance in insect pests and conserves beneficial insects.

Fall armyworm cannot overwinter in Nebraska and certain weather conditions are needed for it to move north. This is why we only see issues with it once in a while. The first hard freeze will take care of this pest.

If they reach fairly large numbers before then, they can defoliate turf and expose plant crowns (growing points) to dehydration. If grass crowns do not dehydrate and die, damaged turf can recover with irrigation and fertilization.

Armyworms are named because of their habit of moving in masses from field crops to lawns or from lawn to lawn looking for greener pastures. While damaged grasses can turn brown, fall armyworm often moves to greener forage before they completely chew plants to the ground and kill crowns.

To watch for this pest, here is what each life stage looks like. Adult moths have dark gray, mottled forewings with light and dark splotches. The female moth lays tan colored egg masses, each containing 100 to 500 eggs, on leaves of trees and flowers and on hardscape like light posts and patio furniture.

Newly hatched larvae are green in color and move in a looping motion. Young larvae are one-half to three-fourths inches long. Full-grown larvae are one and a half inches long. Larvae are smooth-skinned and vary in color from green to almost black. They have stripes the length of their bodies.

There is more than one type of armyworm and fall armyworm is the one of concern. To help differentiate from other armyworms, look at the head for a predominant white, Y-shape between the eyes, four dark spots at the end of the abdomen, and a stripe the length of the body.

Moths are typically attracted to fields of late-maturing corn to lay their eggs. Larvae feed during the day and can move into turfgrass to cause damage.

Be alert for armyworm moths and look for egg masses. If found, monitor lawns for signs of fall armyworm. If insecticide applications are considered, spray treatments have greater and quicker contact than granular applications. Granular treatments need irrigation or rain to activate the insecticide.

Insecticides that are commonly available and registered for control of fall armyworm in turf include carbaryl (Sevin), cyhalothrin, permethrin, spinosad and Dylox. Professional lawn care services have access to additional materials which may have more persistence than homeowner products.