

Seedheads and White Grubs

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Kentucky bluegrass has been forming seed heads. Homeowners sometimes ask if the seed heads are not mowed off, will the seed germinate to grow and help thicken a thin lawn.

The answer is no and letting the grass grow taller to leave seed heads can lead to a thinner lawn. Seed head production uses energy from plants and this reduces stored food reserves. If grass grows too tall so more than one-third is removed during mowing, this is scalping and results in root loss.

Allowing grass to grow taller to try and take advantage of seeds also leads to a lawn appearing stemmy due to seed stalks. And seed stalks are harder to cut, so mowing shreds them giving the lawn a whitish cast.

Maintain a regular mowing height of three to three and one-half inches. Mow often enough so no more than 30 percent of the blade is removed at any one mowing. Seed heads may still develop but don't lower the mowing height to remove them or scalping injury can occur.

If a lawn has not yet been fertilized, or it was fertilized in early spring, consider a fertilizer application following the seeding flush. Keep lawn mower blades sharp to ensure a clean cut.

Another lawn question asked at this time of year is when the best time is to apply insecticides for white grubs.

Insecticides for white grubs do not need to be applied every year. Yearly applications are an unwise use of a pesticide. It can lead to pest resistance and nontarget insect like pollinators are affected.

If a homeowner chooses not to apply insecticides each year, and white grubs happen to cause some damage, it is easily repaired with correct watering and fall fertilization. Some areas might need overseeding, but the damage will be repaired by next spring.

For homeowners who choose to use insecticides, applications are only recommended on lawns that had eight grubs per square foot the previous year. If unacceptable damage occurred last season, a preventive insecticide like Acelepryn, Arena or Merit can be made in June or by July 15.

If one of these preventive insecticide is not applied in June or early July, and grub population reach the threshold of eight grubs per square feet, curative insecticides like Sevin or Dylox can still be applied in mid to late August.

White grubs are part of our ecosystem. If you look hard enough, you will find them in lawns and gardens. However, it takes a certain population to cause unacceptable damage. For lawns, the damage threshold is 8 grubs per square foot.

White grubs feed on turfgrass roots. If the lawn is mowed and watered correctly, the turf replaces the lost roots as long as the grub population is not too high.

Correct irrigation is watering the lawn to a depth of about six inches at each watering. If you have a heavier clay or compacted soil that water will not infiltrate readily, irrigation might have to be done two days in a row to moisten the soil deeply.

Once a deep watering is done, don't water again until the turf shows signs of needing irrigation. This is an off-color or footprints remaining in the lawn after it is walked on. Allowing soils to dry between irrigation allows for oxygen recharge of soil and helps reduce compaction.