

CHINCH BUGS

Are yellow or brown patches taking over parts of your lawn?

Does your lawn have uneven yellow-brown patches that get bigger as the summer progresses? Patches that don't go away, even if you water regularly? They're probably caused by chinch bugs.

Chinch bugs are small insects that feed on grass sap. At first glance, the damage they cause can look like drought damage. Chinch bugs sometimes get confused with white grubs.

Here's a table to help you understand the different types of damage caused by chinch bugs, white grubs and extreme weather conditions.



Photo by Kansas State University

How to identify chinch bugs?

Chinch bugs have three stages of development: eggs, larvae and adults.



When the eggs hatch, the chinch bugs become larvae. This is worth mentioning because that's the stage when chinch bugs damage your lawn. Their physical appearance changes quickly. The body is bright red at first and becomes darker and darker over time. The larvae also continue growing until they reach the adult stage.

Chinch bugs are easy to spot: you'll find them at the base of blades of your lawn's grass, which is where they suck the sap. To locate them, choose a green section of lawn near one of the yellow or brown patches and separate the blades with your fingers. You should see small red or black insects that move quickly on the ground, a little like lice. Note that it's normal to have a few chinch bugs in your lawn and treatment isn't always necessary.

When they reach the adult stage, chinch bugs stop causing damage to your lawn. They are about 4 cm long and can fly (it's the only stage when they have wings).

What conditions favour chinch bug infestations in lawns?

- Ground overexposed to the sun
- **Compacted soil, overfertilized soil (especially with nitrogen)**
- Monoculture, especially if the lawn is mostly Kentucky bluegrass
- Overaccumulation of lawn thatch
- Mowed too close, causing the soil to dry out fast.

How to prevent a chinch bug infestation?

- Read the Growing a thick, green lawn is easy! folder online. It suggests ecological gardening methods for maintaining your lawn.
- Add some seed diversity to your lawn: white clover (grows well in full sun and naturally adds nitrogen to your soil), ryegrass, fine fescue and tall fescue, for example.
- Add organic matter (compost) to your soil to improve its quality. Also, avoid fertilizing too often (**no more than twice a year and only with low-nitrogen fertilizers**).
- Only the first and last mowings of the season should be close to the ground (5 cm). The rest of the year, keep your lawn 7.5 to 8 cm long. This will ensure it grows long roots that make it more heat resistant. Also, the soil won't dry out as fast.
- Consider planting one or more trees on your property to limit your lawn's exposure to the sun. Trees also reduce heat islands and clean the air we breathe, even as they protect your lawn.

Do you suspect your lawn has a chinch bug problem? If so, feel free to call the Green Line. We'll be pleased to advise you and suggest earth-friendly solutions for dealing with the issue.



Photo by Fred Bakendak

Comparing the symptoms

	Chinch bugs	White grubs	Dormant lawn
Effect on lawn:	Uneven yellow-brown patches that expand as the chinch bugs reproduce.	Uneven brown patches appear on the lawn. These can easily be pulled off in clumps. Skunks, raccoons and other grub predators can further damage the lawn by digging into it.	The lawn turns yellow during hot spells but regains its green when the weather conditions are more favourable to growth and development.
Roots:	The roots remain anchored in the earth, even if the grass is dead .	White grubs eat the grass's roots, making it easier to pull up entire strips of lawn (like a wig or sod). The grass is no longer anchored in the soil.	The lawn remains alive even if the grass appears dead. A healthy lawn can survive up to six weeks without water.
When does the damage appear?	In July (when the weather turns hot).	Usually in early spring , sometimes in the fall.	When weather conditions are extreme (during heat waves and in the winter).

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