

# Insects -Hairy Chinch Bug



In recent years, concern over chinch bugs causing damage to lawns has increased. Many lawns are only partially damaged, but in severe cases the entire lawn will be damaged to such an extent that it must be entirely renovated.

## Damage

- Chinch bugs have piercing mouthparts through which they suck the sap from the crown and stems of turfgrass. Populations of chinch bugs tend to be aggregated which initially results in localized dead patches. These dead areas have the characteristic appearance of being brown, irregular sunken patches, which coalesce into larger dead areas as the season progresses. Weeds invade these dead areas, providing a very untidy appearance. All common turfgrasses seem to be equally preferred by chinch bugs, but some varieties like Kentucky Blue Grass may be more susceptible to chinch bug injury.
- There are several species of chinch bug, but the one causing damage to turfgrass is the hairy chinch bug, *Blissus leucopterus hirtus*. This insect is quite small, the adults being 4mm in length. The immature nymphs are bright red in colour when first hatched, and begin to darken from brick red to grey when they are nearly mature. They have a characteristic white band across their abdomen which becomes covered by their enlarging wing buds as they become larger. If lawns are suspected of having chinch bug infestations, this can be accurately determined using the following method. Obtain a large can which has a circular area of approximately 200 square centimetres. Cut out the bottom to form a cylinder and force this into the turf. By filling the cylinder with water, the chinch bugs will soon float to the surface where they can be more easily seen. On a lawn which has little or no damage, ten of these samples should be taken trough-out the entire lawn. If any chinch bugs are found, treatment is advised. On lawns where damage is visible, samples should be taken in the healthy grass near the dead patches.

## Lifecycle

- The adult chinch bug spends the winter congregated under trees and shrubs and on the edges of lawns under hedges and in flower beds. As the temperatures become warmer in the spring, the adults move into the lawn and begin depositing eggs. As many as 20 eggs per female may be laid during May and June. The first young nymphs can be found in late May to early June. Severe damage is not noticed until August or September after the occurrence of several weeks of hot, dry weather. Light damage does not usually appear until the middle of July. In lawns having no visible damage, the optimum time to check and treat for chinch bug infestations is the second to third week of July. This will vary from year to year and from one locality to another. At this time all eggs have hatched and the initial stages of damage are minimal. Treating an infestation at this time will remove the additional stress of chinch bug feeding during the normally dry period of August.
- In the St. John's and surrounding areas, chinch bug infestations continue to grow. The young red bugs have been seen as early as mid June and as late as October. There is usually two generations of young a season, but a third generation is not uncommon in badly infested areas.

## Control

- There is only one insecticide registered for control of the hairy chinch bug: Trounce. Please talk to a garden centre staff for additional information on the use of this product. Because chinch bugs tend to avoid light at the lawn surface and will crawl into crevices in the soil below, good penetration of the insecticide is essential. Always follow the directions on the labels exactly to ensure best results.

## Preventative Approach

- With increased pressure to reduce pesticide use in the landscape, a well rounded preventative approach to lawn maintenance is advised. Keep lawn healthy with proper fertilizer. Both spring and fall fertilizer is recommended. Limestone should be added in both the spring and fall. Chinch bugs do not like a lot of water so be sure to water your lawn when it is hot and dry. However, you must abide by city watering rules. Dethatch your lawn regularly. Fall dethatching may also decrease overwintering habitats. Watch lawn for any changes or spots. The sooner you act on a chinch bug infestation, the less damage will be done.

## Organic Approach

- Over seed your lawn with endophyte enhanced grasses. New sod versions of these grasses are also becoming available. The chinch bug does not seem to eat this type of grass.

## Murray's Info Sheets

P.O. BOX 601, 1525 PORTUGAL COVE ROAD, PORTUGAL COVE, NL, CANADA A1M 3R6

TEL: (709) 895-2800 • FAX: (709) 895-1000 • E-MAIL: [murrays@nl.rogers.com](mailto:murrays@nl.rogers.com) • [www.murraysgardens.com](http://www.murraysgardens.com)