

REDUCING PESTICIDES

it's perfectly natural.



How to Manage Chinch Bugs in Your Lawn

Monitoring your lawn carefully and responding correctly is essential to dealing with any potential pest problems. Chinch bugs can be common in Toronto lawns. It's very important to determine if damage to your lawn is due to chinch bugs or other factors such as drought or disease.

Chinch bugs are small (4 mm) insects that can be red or dark brown (see photo 1). They attack where the grass emerges from the ground, at the crown and stem of the plant. The damage appears as sunken patches of dead grass that grow larger as chinch bugs spread outward (see photo 2). Chinch bugs favour hot, dry weather, and damage is usually noticeable in August.



Photo 1: Chinch bugs (shown larger than actual size)
Source: Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food



Photo 2: Chinch bug damage on a lawn
Source: Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food

Monitor your lawn regularly, particularly in hot, dry weather, for early signs of chinch bugs. They like to hide at the base of the plant, near the soil level, and thrive in sunny dry areas that are poorly watered.

Check for chinch bugs with the following test:

1. Cut off both ends of a large can 20 – 25 cm (8 – 9 in) in diameter, such as a coffee can;
2. Push the can halfway down into the lawn. Wear gloves to protect your hands;
3. Fill the can with water and wait a few minutes to see if chinch bugs float to the top.

Even with no signs of damage, this test should be conducted in mid to late July in several sunny spots around the lawn. If there are dead patches, test at the edge of the damaged area.

The City's by-law permits the use of pesticides to control a chinch bug infestation. If you count 20 chinch bugs using the above method, you may have an infestation and can apply a pesticide that is otherwise restricted under the Pesticide By-law. Always follow label directions. You can also consult a licensed lawn care provider or other plant health care expert to confirm the infestation and recommend treatment options. A natural lawn and garden care program to increase the health and pest resistance of your lawn should accompany any treatment option.

The best defence against chinch bugs is a healthy lawn. Such a lawn will withstand more chinch bugs without visible damage than an unhealthy lawn. In the spring, aerate your lawn and plant grass seeds such as fescues or perennial ryegrass, which can be more resistant to chinch bugs than kentucky bluegrass. Throughout the year, water deeply once per week to avoid the dry conditions that chinch bugs prefer.

Sources:

Toronto Public Health. *Pesticide Free...A Guide to Natural Lawn and Garden Care*. Toronto: City of Toronto. August 2004.

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food. *Factsheet 97-031 "Hairy Chinch Bugs in Lawns"*
www.gov.on.ca/OMAFRA/english/crops/facts/97-031.htm