

Lawn problems:

Leatherjackets

What are they?

Leatherjacket grubs are the larvae of Crane Fly (daddy long legs), which are commonly seen flying about in summer and autumn. In late summer, each adult female fly lays up to 300 eggs in grassy areas, where they soon hatch into Leather jackets. They stay underground over winter and cause most damage to the turf the following spring before hatching and flying away as new crane flies.

What do the look like?

The grubs are legless and grey/brown without a distinct head and usually grow to a maximum length of about 3cm (1").

How do I know if they are present?

In newly delivered turf they may be spotted falling out of the turf if left for a few hours before laying. In newly laid turf or an established lawn they are harder to identify without taking up to expose the roots although Leatherjackets sometimes come above ground to eat the grass leaves at night. Poor growth of an established lawn sometimes indicates their presence although often the first signs of insect larvae are when birds begin pecking in your lawn.

Why did they appear in my lawn?

Damaging infestations can be highly localized and sporadic in occurrence. Poorly maintained lawns are more susceptible to damage, so attention paid to feeding, watering and moss prevention will help avoid damaging infestations. Insects of many types are common in gardens and the insect larvae which may be found in rolls of turf could equally be found naturally in an established lawn or elsewhere in the garden.

How do I get rid of them?

Environmental concerns mean chemical control is no longer possible with the withdrawal of pesticides used for the control of leatherjackets. If you can see chafer larvae on your turf just pick them off and release them somewhere else.

Biological control can also be used in the form of nematodes. These are microscopic parasitic worms which only feed on specific insects. Because they are very small they have to be used at the correct time of year and in exactly the correct conditions of soil moisture and temperature. Their use is economical when the lawn is small but would be impractical on a field scale. Nematodes used to control insect pests are known by their Latin names. Those used to control leatherjackets are normally *Steinernema feltiae*. Sources of nematodes can easily be found on the internet.

How do I repair the lawn?

Damage caused to the turf is usually temporary and will cease when the larvae metamorphose into adults and fly away. Repair damaged turf by re-sowing with grass seed or lay new turf.

Leatherjackets are the larvae of crane flies, or daddy-longlegs. From autumn through to summer, the larvae feed on grass roots, eventually emerging as adult flies in late-summer.

