

I've been getting quite a few emails lately from people wondering why crows or raccoons are ripping their lawns up. I suspect most of these lawns are infested with an insect pest that recently moved into our area and the crows and raccoons are tearing up lawns to find a delicious dinner of beetle grubs. The European chafer is a beetle that causes serious damage to lawn grass. The Adult European chafers are brick-colored to light brown 1/2 inch long beetles. The larvae that cause the damage are C-shaped and white with a dark head. When mature, the larvae have three pair of visible legs and are about 3/4 inch long. These insects can build up to enormous populations and can do serious harm to the grass, but the worst damage occurs when critters rip the lawn apart trying to find them for dinner.

You can dig into the soil to see if you have them, or you can watch for their mating flights that occur around sunset in June and July. The adult beetles don't do any damage and they usually don't fly far before they begin mating. Soon after they return to the lawn to lay their eggs.

For health and environmental reasons, I don't recommend using chemical pesticides to deal with European chafer. Instead a better way to control this insect is by using parasitic nematodes. Parasitic nematode products designed for soil grubs, containing *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* nematodes. Apply the nematodes during early September. Follow directions carefully. Best to apply in the evening. The soil must be moist and follow up by watering the lawn after application.

If you time your application well, and follow all directions, the nematodes should control the problem for at least a year. If your lawn has been damaged, consider renting an aerator machine and overseed. Make sure to rake the seed into the holes, fertilize and keep the soil moist for better germination.