Lawn Insects

Contrary to popular belief, insects are not a common cause of lawn damage in California.

Poor lawn care, especially incorrect watering or planting grass varieties not suited to your area, is the most likely cause of unhealthy or dying lawns. Turfgrass diseases and dog urine also produce similar damage. Never apply an insecticide unless a damaging level of a known insect is confirmed. Insecticides are only effective if applied at the right time and in the right manner. Many insecticides also kill good bugs—use them only as a last resort.

Keep your lawn healthy.

- Plant grass species best suited for your area.
- Over-seed thin areas in the spring and fall.
- Water deeply and infrequently.
- Perform routine maintenance on sprinkler heads.
- Apply fertilizer appropriately.
- Aerate your lawn annually; remove thatch if it exceeds ½ inch.
- Cut only ⅓ of grass height at each mowing and keep lawnmower blades sharp.

How do you know if insects are causing damage?

- Brown spots in lawns can have different causes. Over- or under-watering, plant disease, over-application of fertilizer/herbicide or chemical spill, and dog urine all cause similar looking damage.
- Before applying an insecticide, confirm that insects are present at high enough numbers to cause damage.
  - For grubs, dig around roots. You do not need to treat if there are 5 or fewer grubs per square foot.
  - For other insects, perform a drench test (described on reverse).
  - If you do not find live pest insects at high levels, do not treat with pesticides.

How to perform a drench test:

- Measure out an area of lawn that equals 1 square yard.
- Mix 3–4 tablespoons of dishwashing liquid to 2 gallons of water.
- Evenly apply the 2 gallons to 1 square yard of your lawn.
- Watch the area for 10 minutes and count the number of caterpillars that rise to the surface.
- Treat the area only if insect numbers exceed 5 armyworms or cutworms or 15 lawn moth larvae per square yard.

What you do in your home and landscape affects our water and health.

- Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways and harm human health.
- Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible.
- Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.