

Sod Webworm



Adult sod webworms are common “lawn moths” that may be disturbed to flight during mowing. The damaging stage is the caterpillar or larval stage. The caterpillar stages feed on grass blades and cause injury when abundant. Typical sod webworm caterpillars have a dark head and their bodies are light brown or gray with dark spotting. Sod webworm infested thatch has silken tunnels produced by the caterpillars. During the day they hide within this webbed tube and at night they move out a short distance to feed. Sod webworms are typically 1 to 1-1/2 inches in length when full grown. Adult sod webworms are the most commonly observed stage of the insect. They are small, buff-colored “lawn moths” that often rest on grass or shrubbery. They are weak fliers and when disturbed from these resting places they may fly short distances across a lawn.

The damage caused by sod webworms may first appear in early spring. The damage shows up as small dead patches of grass among the normally growing grass. The summer generation may cause general turf thinning or even irregular dead patches in late June into early August. In some instances, the brown patches are punctured with pencil-sized holes a result of birds searching for the webworm burrows. Sod webworms prefer sunny areas and the larvae are often found on south facing, steep slopes and banks, where it is hot and dry. Heavily shaded turf is seldom attacked by the larvae. The most severe damage usually shows up in July and August when the temperature is hot and the grass is not growing vigorously. In fact, most sod webworm damage is mistaken for heat and drought stress. Sod webworm-damaged lawns may recover slowly. Without irrigation and light fertilizations, these thin turf areas allow weeds to establish in the lawn making it unsightly.

