

European Marsh Crane Fly (Leatherjackets)

The European Marsh Crane Fly is frequently confused with the Daddy Long Legs. Unlike the Daddy Long Legs the Crane Fly has wings and the immature stage is a pest of lawns. The immature crane fly, called a leatherjacket, feeds on the roots and shoots of grasses.

Injury

Dead patches of grass are first noticed and upon closer inspection leatherjackets will be found active in and around the roots of grass. In the early spring seeing many leatherjackets on driveways or sidewalks is common.

Life Cycle

Unlike the dandy long legs the flies have wings and appear from mid-July to mid-September, depending on the weather. They have very long legs and are similar to a large mosquito. The female lays 350-600 black, oval eggs on the soil near grass roots. The eggs hatch in about a week into very small brown larvae. These larvae or leatherjackets begin feeding on grass roots and crowns when they hatch from eggs. They continue to feed on grass until the fall and over winter in the larvae form.

In the spring they begin to feed again and reach up to 1 1/2 inches long, are dark gray and smoothed skin. If squeezed, green slime will often appear. This is due to the grass they have been eating.

After completing their growth in the second season they pupate in the soil. The pupae or cocoons are dark brown, have many spines and tubercles and when disturbed will wiggle. The adults emerge about two weeks later.

Chemical Control

There are a couple of chemical insecticides available to control leatherjackets. Sevin (carbaryl) or Lawn Grub Killer (imidacloprid) which depending on the weather may be applied between May and October. You can also check with your local gardening suppliers/Nursery businesses for the availability of insect parasitic nematodes.

Precautions

Follow all label directions accurately and wear protective clothing such as rubber boots and gloves. It is illegal to use pesticides unsafely or for uses not listed on the label.

For further information contact your local agriculture office.