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European beetle decimating Vancouver lawns

The European chafer beetle is the influenza of pest infestation – threatening, infectious, and inconvenient.



The European chafer beetle causes a mess in residents' yards and city boulevards

Flashy tin foil, chicken wire, and fake owls are popping up in response to resident's anger, confusion, and annoyance about the pests, the crows eating them, and the cities' limited options and information about the chafer invasion.

"The city does not know what to do," said Lana Gustavson, a homeowner in Southern Vancouver. "I tried to get information but wasn't given any."

Aware of the intensity of the chafer outbreak, the city started planning control treatments for affected public areas but not private areas. The infestation problem on private lawns rests on the homeowner.

However, a lack of information leaves residents confused and without a resolution.

Gustavson, and other residents in the area, are tired and frustrated with the beetles and the cities' lack of initiative when dealing with the problem.

"They are only concerned with city property, not homeowners," she said. "No one knows how to deal with it and it's everywhere."

The City's approach

[Grow Natural](#), a city subsidized lawn program, provides information and treatment for homeowners. It is the go-to program for residents suffering from chafer fever.



Chafer larvae

“It is up to the lawn owner, not the city,” said Maria Keating, known as the ‘Bug Lady’ at [City Farmer](#) and a biological control consultant.

“The solution is not to grow grass. You can start growing gardens instead. It’s all about changing attitudes.”

Growing [lawn alternatives](#) or treating affected chafer areas with a biological control agent called [nematodes](#) are effective measures when dealing with chafer beetles.

A negative impact on property value

Bill Dick, a realty agent and homeowner of an infected chafer lawn, recognizes the negative consequence of chafer beetles on property value.

“It is not positive for property value. Your house may be hard to sell unless you treat the soil,” said Dick. “I didn’t know my lawn had chafer beetles until September and I don’t know how to get rid of them.”

With the ability to travel several kilometers, chafers fly into homeowner’s lawns, city parks, schoolyards, and boulevards. From there, they burrow deep into the soil, feed off the roots of grass, and lay their eggs.

Predators such as raccoons, skunks, and crows feed on the deeply hidden grubs, rip up the grass, and destroy a once lavishly green area.



A crow uses its strong beak to grab the chafer grubs buried deep into the soil - damaging the lawn as a result

Infestation spreading

The foreign pests appeared in a boulevard in New Westminster in 2001, and quickly spread to Burnaby, East, South, and now West Vancouver.

Riley Park, a picturesque heritage neighborhood, did not show signs of the chafer beetle, that is, until recently.

A couple of weeks ago, resident Stephanie Willox, noticed an abundance of crows and raccoons digging up her lawn. She didn’t know what was going on and why her lawn looked like a graveyard.

“We’ve lived here for four years, and just noticed it,” said Willox. “A lot of people don’t know about the chafer and think we just aren’t taking care of our lawn.”

Like Gustavson, Willox is confused about possible solutions for the infestation.

“There’s nothing I can do. You cannot use nematodes until July. I called Nutri-Lawn to get some pesticides but couldn’t get it because of the pesticide ban,” said Willox.

The city put through a [pesticide ban](#) in 2006 that restricts residents and lawn care companies from spraying nuisance bugs – a method that is 90% effective in killing chafers.

Brent Jackson, a homeowner of a chafer-free lawn, lives a few blocks down from Willox, and is worried about the beetle spreading to his lawn and potentially decreasing his property value.

“I want my neighbors’ property to be nice and green, it adds to my property value,” said Jackson.

Homeowners are at a loss when it comes to a solution for their torn up lawns. Treating areas with nematodes or putting in a lawn alternative is the strongest method of control for the chafers.

The infestation is not limited to private lawns. As the pest migrates west, more communities and more public properties will be hit.

“This is not anything I would I have ever anticipated. I was considering putting a lawn in my front yard but might have to rethink it,” said Jackson.

Photo of Chafer grubs courtesy of Flickr user [RichardRichard](#).



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Posted by [Katie Dangerfield](#) on Oct 29 2009. Filed under [City](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#). You can leave a response or trackback to this entry

7 Comments for “European beetle decimating Vancouver lawns”

1.

Steven Park
[November 9, 2009 - 8:40 am](#)

These are the stupid things that have been tearing up my lawn! I wish there was more information about this, this is the first time i heard it mentioned.
-Steven Park

2.

Derrick Shroggin
[November 9, 2009 - 11:11 am](#)

I was wondering why everyone’s yard was looking so beat up this year.

3.

Zonia Hodge
[February 11, 2010 - 8:49 pm](#)

Nematodes – great. Treatment only costs \$1.00 per sq. ft. And, who needs an alternative to a lawn which requires too much more work!

4.

Alberto
[March 8, 2010 - 4:45 pm](#)

I ran into this problem about four years ago but my gardener said it was too late to do anything about it. The next summer he took care of it and it has looked healthy ever since.

5.

Karen L
[March 14, 2010 - 11:19 am](#)

Alberto, did your gardener put in the nematodes? I wonder how much work this involves and whether it needs to be done annually.

6.

Paul
[May 20, 2010 - 8:24 am](#)

I am a landscaper in Vancouver and have put together a website with information regarding the Chafer beetle. Most of your questions can be answered at [cuttingedgevancouver.com](#)

7.

[Crow Warning | sam bradd designs](#)
[October 11, 2010 - 10:37 pm](#)

[...] patches strewn across lawns, boulevards, and parks. It turns out that Vancouver is experiencing an infestation of the European chafer beetle and the crows are enjoying a giant buffet. Building on the experience deterring crows from [...]

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