



Chafer beetles blamed for butchered Metro Vancouver lawns

CTV Vancouver

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Just days before spring, people across Metro Vancouver are finding their lawns torn to shreds by hungry crows and raccoons.

The culprits: European chafer beetles, an invasive species that's becoming more and more common at most municipalities in the region.

The beetles' grubs are too tempting for predators to resist, which is why frustrated homeowners have been finding their yards upended by little paws and beaks.



Crows and raccoons have been digging up yards hoping to dine on the beetles' grubs. March 16, 2015. (CTV)

“This is the jumbo prawn dinner for a raccoon at the midnight smorgasboard,” said Stephen Saunders of Cutting Edge Lawn Care.

Chafers also feed on root systems, leaving weakened lawns that are easier for predators to plow in search of a quick meal.

The beetles were introduced in the region in 2001 through a tainted shipment of soil in New Westminster, and have since become a widespread problem.

Saunders said it's particularly bad in Vancouver's west side this year.

“I'm not sure if it's due to the incredibly mild winter that we had, but we've noticed a lot more damage,” he said. “A lot more people are calling us.”

There are things you can do to discourage turf-turners, including putting plastic webbing out on your lawn or dangling CDs from trees to scare crows.

Some homeowners swear by a method of mixing hot sauce with water and detergent and spraying it over the grass.

Saunders said the best option is to interrupt the lifecycle of the chafers with a low-toxicity pesticide, which residents only have a limited window of time to do over the summer.

“During the summer when you need to do the treatment is the only time when you won't find your lawn being dug up,” he said.

“The larva that's in the grass at this time is going to emerge around June and they're going to mate and lay a new generation of eggs – then the whole cycle starts again in November, December, January.”

Another option is to spray lawns midsummer with nematodes, microscopic worms that attack chafer eggs.

For more information, visit the City of Vancouver's [European chafer beetle information site](#).

With a report from CTV Vancouver's Peter Grainger

NORAHG Response

THE HISTORY OF THE EUROPEAN CHAFER

In 1940, in the State of New York, the European Chafer was officially identified as a turfgrass pest. It was accidentally introduced from the Orient and Europe. Forty years later, in 1980, it reached the Niagara Peninsula in South-Western Ontario. Its rampage continued across the Greater Toronto Area throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In 1997, William H Gathercole, one of the foremost turfgrass experts in the nation, first reported its spread in Montreal, Quebec. By 2001, this insect had also spread across several states of the North-Eastern U.S. In 2001, Mr Gathercole also first identified the insect in the Pacific North-West, in New Westminster, British Columbia, while local experts and entomologists were somehow baffled about an insect pest that had created a well-documented ECOLOGICAL DISASTER in Urban Landscapes throughout Eastern North America. Additionally, Mr Gathercole exhaustively investigated the introduction of this pest into British Columbia and Quebec. In both cases, the European Chafer was imported by contaminated sod products, and NOT soil products, originating from grower locations in the Province of Ontario.