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### Here We Go Again on Grub Control, and There Actually is Something New for the Homeowner!

by Art Drysdale

by **Art Drysdale**

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Art Drysdale, a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada, is now a resident of Parksville, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo. He has renovated an old home and has a new garden there. His radio gardening vignettes are heard in south-western Ontario over two radio stations: Easy 101 FM out of Tillsonburg at 2 PM weekdays and CD98.9 FM out of Norfolk County at 11:40 AM weekdays.

Art also has his own website at <http://www.artdrysdale.com>

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The three photos above go back to 1995, when my Toronto neighbours the Sheppards, each night in October could watch as several raccoons came in after midnight to tear up their back garden turf. The damage that gardeners/homeowners experience is the same or worse the following spring if something is not done to control the grubs either in early spring or preferably in late summer. Author photos. Below, the new ready-to-spray GrubOut from Nu-Gro.

In these editorial pieces I generally like to deal with topics and ideas that are "new or different" or updates of previous information. But, I also think that someone has to set right some of the incorrect ideas that are seen or heard in one or other of the gardening media.

This week's topic is grubs in lawns. Now, technically I should have done this a month ago so those not quite sure of what to do could have prepared themselves with the proper products.

First, let's establish that the usual tell-tale sign of grubs in your lawn are the regular nightly visits of raccoons or squirrels that dig up the turf. The simple cause of this is that the raccoons know the grubs are there and they want to eat them. To do that they come and tear up the grass, leaving something that more resembles a disc-harrowed field rather than a home lawn.

A former neighbour of mine in Toronto, Norman Sheppard, called in the autumn of 1995 pleading with me to get him something to control the raccoons. Each morning he was going out and spending an hour or so putting torn-up pieces of turf back down on his formerly nice back lawn. I explained that it was the white grubs, likely of the June beetle, that were the real cause and that he would have to get rid of them so that the raccoons (or squirrels) would move on elsewhere. However, I pointed out, that mid-October is not a great time to control grubs. At that time they are beginning to burrow deeper in the soil, and soon reach a point too deep for any control (chemical or even the supposedly ecology-friendly nematodes) to reach.

The ideal time for application of most grub controls (except for the chemical Merit, which can be applied only by professional applicators--not homeowners) is in August and up possibly to the middle of September. However, if there is a major infestation that causes much disruption of the turf by raccoons in early spring (as is the case again now) various controls can be put on sometime around the middle of April up to about the middle of May. At that time the older grubs are present and attract the raccoons because they are within the roots of the turf. This time of application is narrow, however. Usually by the middle of May these older grubs begin to pupate. In their pupae stage, grubs are not affected by: the chemical Diazinon (previously the preferred standard chemical for control of grubs), the so-called 'natural' control of friendly nematodes (microscopic insects that are supposed to destroy the grubs), or any other chemical.

Imagine my surprise then, at hearing on a nationally syndicated radio garden broadcast last Saturday, the suggestion that the reason a new product called GrubOut had not worked (for a caller in the Montreal area) was that it had been put on too early!

GrubOut, available in both the Wilson's and CIL product lines from the Nu-Gro people, is a slightly different approach to grub control. The active ingredient is Sevin (also known as Carbaryl) that apparently has less difficulty penetrating the thatch layer. Actually, using Sevin for the control of grubs is not new. Back in 1999, commercial lawn spray companies in Ontario were allowed to use a newly licensed chemical known as Sevin XLR Plus (the SLR stands for extra long residual). It was never made available in a 'domestic pack' for homeowner use, but 'regular' Sevin has been in use for well over two decades and is a reliable insecticide.

The main points about any control for grubs is that the lawn be well wetted (either from rain or sprinkler watering) at the time of application, and that it be watered well after the application in order that the chemical will be carried down into the soil where it can actually contact and kill the grubs. And, at least as important, it is senseless to apply anything at a time when the grubs are not present to be killed; i.e. when they are in the pupae stage as they will be soon, or too late in the fall when they are too deep in the soil.

Hence the advice that the GrubOut was applied too early, and the homeowner should wait until late May or early June is definitely incorrect. The radio caller's question was really why the chemical had not worked. The answer to that



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was more than likely that it had not been applied correctly; i.e. not watered in well, or not applied on an already wet turf, or simply not applied at the proper rate.

Another inaccuracy regarding white grubs has arisen again this year as well. There was an article originating in southern Ontario stating that a simple control for white grubs in the lawn (now) is an application of corn glutenmeal. This also arose in March 1999 and those who would have us using no 'chemicals' immediately jumped on the bandwagon saying that no one should use anything else but this so-called natural control.

Being doubtful, I called Pam Charbonneau who heads up turfgrass research in Guelph for the Ontario Turfgrass Research Foundation. She told me that while this unbalanced fertilizer (about 10% nitrogen content) does have an effect as a pre-emergent against crabgrass, it is *NOT effective at all* against white grubs.

And, if you are wanting to control crabgrass, why not use the best chemical for the job? And that would be Dimension! The former chemical of choice for this task was Dacthal, but Dimension gives homeowners a longer "window of opportunity" for the application. Dimension not only stops crabgrass (and other grass seed) from germinating, it also will kill any tiny crabgrass seedlings that have already germinated if you happen to be a week or so late getting it on.

The proper time to apply a fertilizer with crabgrass control is about when the golden bell (*Forsythia*) shrubs are in full yellow bloom, and certainly by the time the lilacs bloom. After that, crabgrass may already have germinated and if the seedlings increase beyond the tiny first-leaves stage, they will *not* be killed, even by Dimension. So, if you had crabgrass last year, you have very little time left to get and apply a fertilizer containing Dimension. Keep in mind if your crabgrass was just in one area of the lawn, then apply the fertilizer/crabgrass control only to that area, and apply just the straight turf fertilizer, without the crabgrass control, to the balance of the lawn. That will save you considerable money.

Finally, as regards the so-called friendly nematodes, I have explained my experience with these previously and I've been taken to task for it. I still say, again, if they are as effective as those who promote them say they are, why is it there are no large gardening chemical companies selling them? Think about it!

Personally, not having a lawn on which to experiment, I had a good friend do so on a large lawn when they were first being distributed in Canada by the Plant Products Company Ltd. back about 1995. Though used according to directions (exactly) there was no effect on the grubs. And, Plant Products no longer sells a product they know not to be effective *most of the time!* If you want to experiment, by all means do so, but be warned you are likely going to be wasting your money.

At the same time keep in mind my advice that nematodes *do* work if applied on bare soil for such insects as Iris borer. However, I prefer Iris grower/hybridizer Chuck Chapman's advice for the control of this pest: simply burn off the foliage of all Iris plants in April. This apparently destroys most of the invasive pests.

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Art Drysdale was a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada. He is now a temporary resident of Parksville, British Columbia, preparing to build a new home and garden at nearby Nanoose Bay (both on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo). He is heard Saturdays from 8:05 to 10 AM, with a live radio broadcast on Toronto's powerful and clear, AM740 CHWO Primetime Radio.

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