



## Sustainable Maintenance Tips - Chinch Bug

Lawns and gardens are teeming with life. Thousands of different insect species live within and upon our lawns, but only a fraction of these actually cause damage. Harsh chemical pesticides can kill various kinds of insects, both beneficial and harmful. The following lists some sustainable solutions for the common Chinch Bug.

### **Chinch Bug**

Adult chinch bugs overwinter in lawns, usually within the thatch layer. They emerge around mid to late May when the temperatures reach 20 degrees C or higher. Eggs are laid after emergence and hatch out within a few weeks. Young chinch bugs, or nymphs, are very small and bright red in colour with a white banded back. Nymphs pass through five growth states on their way to becoming adults. As the nymphs turn to adults during the summer, they darken, turn black in colour and grow white wings, which are folded over their backs. Adults are quite small at only 0.5 cm in length with the nymphs being much smaller.

### **Damage:**

A healthy lawn can tolerate this common turf pest, up to a certain extent, but if the populations become too large scattered patches of yellowing and dying grass will appear on the lawn. The damaged portions tend to be in areas of stress such as hillsides, dry areas that receive a lot of sun, and those parts of the lawn along the edges (curbsides, driveways, sidewalks, etc.) Before taking control measures, make sure this is in fact the problem. Remove the top and bottom of a coffee can or large juice can. Push it into the turf along the edge of what is suspected chinch bug damage. Fill with water and wait 15 minutes. The chinch bugs will float to the top. A few may not be a problem, but between 6 - 10 could cause damage. Remember not to count big eyed bugs which are a chinch bug predator and live among them. They look very similar but have much larger eyes, which are a distinctive physical characteristic.

### **Sustainable Maintenance Tips:**

- A well maintained lawn is key to resisting chinch bug damage. This includes aerating, mowing at a suitable height (3 inches / 7 cm), proper watering and fertilizing, and de-thatching.
- Chinch bugs overwinter in thatch (fibrous mats of old grass and undecomposed organic material) and thrive in warm dry weather, so monitoring these two things is very important. If there is more than ½ inch (1 cm) of thatch, use a rake or de-thatching machine to remove some of the thatch. When it's dry, watering is important for turf strength. Water early in the morning to prevent evaporation and apply a suitable amount. One inch ( 2 cm) over the entire lawn in one application will suffice. Short, shallow watering will lead to poor root growth and weakened lawns.
- Reseed infested areas with a grass mixture which also contains perennial ryegrass.
- Re-think areas that are under continual chinch attacks and modify them to be less hospitable. You may wish to consider planting trees and shrubs for shade and ground cover, especially on slopes.

With a bit of planning and proper lawn management, the need for chemical pesticides can be greatly reduced, if not eliminated. Easing our dependency on chemical lawn additives is better for both human and environmental health and is a necessary step towards the attainable goal of sustainable gardening and landscape maintenance.

**For more information...**

On the Pesticide ByLaw (P-800) including signage requirements, which products can still be used, alternatives to pesticides, sustainable maintenance practices, or to access details on our public awareness sessions, visit one of the HRM Customer Service Centres or log on to our website at [www.halifax.ca](http://www.halifax.ca). You can also call our representatives at 490-4000 or email us at [Pestbylaw@halifax.ca](mailto:Pestbylaw@halifax.ca).

