



QUESTION AND ANSWER

Tasty grubs good for raccoons, bad for smooth lawns

Chafer beetles lay eggs in short grass attracting visits from hungry pests



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Dear Helen: Raccoons digging for grubs in the soil have ripped up large chunks of our front lawn. Short of standing on guard all night to chase them away, what can be done?

The raccoons are feeding on European chafer beetle larvae plump, C-shaped, white grubs. The tan adult beetles swarm and mate in June and July and

lay eggs in the soil, their preference being where turf grasses are growing. The emerging larvae feed from the end of July onward, then winter in the soil and resume feeding as the soil warms in the spring, until May. Then they pupate, to emerge as adult beetles again in June.

It is not easy to deter raccoons, without deploying motion-activated sprinklers such as the ScareCrow. Other possible routes to relief:

- Replace the lawn with garden(s).

- Maintain a thick, healthy lawn. Reseed if necessary in March, and reseed again over damaged patches in April and May. This pest does not feed in May, as it pupates, giving the new grass a chance to grow.

- Leaving the lawn up to three inches long makes egg

laying difficult. Short lawns are easy targets.

- Overseed lightly with white clover, which does not appeal to the chafer beetle.

- Treat the lawn with parasitic nematodes that seek and kill the grubs. The best time to do this is late July, but as long as the soil is warm and grubs are present in the soil, applications can be continued through early September. The lawn must be soaked thoroughly before applying the nematodes, available at some garden centres, and they must be watered in very well. Apply the nematodes in the evening. Ultraviolet light kills them. Keep the soil consistently moist for two weeks following the application.

Dear Helen: This spring, wood ashes scratched lightly into the soil of the potted clematis plants on my deck revived them noticeably, but by early August the leaves were turning a dark blue. Should I do anything to correct this?

Wood ashes are strongly alkaline and a source of potash (potassium), a major plant nutrient that hardens plant cells to promote sturdiness, general vigour, and resistance to disease and weather extremes. Your plants' initial reaction to wood ashes in the soil indicates that the soil may have been more acidic than the preferred neutral pH of clematis plants.

The potassium, however, might also have initiated an imbalance in the soil. Reddish or purplish-blue leaf colouring usually indicates a deficiency in phosphorus, an essential macronutrient for optimum growth and in particular for root formation and flowering.

Nitrogen, the third main plant nutrient, promotes vigorous green growth. You do not mention any curtailing of growth or yellowing of older leaves, signs of a nitrogen deficiency, though they could be expected because potash acts as a counter to nitrogen. The three major plant nutri-

GARDEN EVENTS

View Royal meeting. The View Royal Garden Club will meet on Thursday, Aug. 28 at 7:30 p.m. in All Saints' Church Hall, 294 Stewart Ave.

Metichosin potter Robin Hopper will present *Zen and Now: A look at Japanese Gardens*, their development and interpretations, a lecture and slide show tracing Japanese gardens from their beginnings as interpretations of Chinese painting. Hopper will also describe the five basic Japanese garden styles in the Metichosin garden of Chosin Pottery. New members and visitors are welcome. For further information call 250-727-0076.

ents are represented on fertilizer labels as three numbers indicating the nitrogen content first, then phosphorus, then potassium (N-P-K).

If a slight deficiency in phosphorus is the problem, you could try watering with a very dilute solution of Raingrow's Liquid Bone Meal (Bloom-A-

Master gardeners and sustainable gardening. Glendale Gardens and Woodland, home of the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, is accepting students for the Victoria Master Gardener Program, consisting of 31 sessions followed by a volunteer training period. The course begins Sept. 4 and is held Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings for 16 weeks. To register for an information session call 250-479-6162. Glendale's Sustainable Gardening course beginning Sept. 2 consists of 30 sessions covering the basics of organic gardening on Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings. For details of these courses please visit www.hcp.bc.ca.

Long, 0-12-0). Because the summer is winding down, I would only do this once or twice. With new growth in late winter or early spring, replenish a top layer of soil with fresh planting mix and fertilize with a balanced formula, preferably a natural-source, slow-release fertilizer.