

# Invasion of the Moths

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The seemingly overnight invasion of moths all over Sheridan recently has many residents wondering what is going on. These moths were around last year but not in the numbers seen this year. These are one of the many moths in the Sod Webworm species, sometimes these are referred to as lawn moths. Each one of these has a little bit different live cycle, most of the larva eat grass but some eat broadleaved plants. These are not the same as the cut worms which the adults are similar in size, however the larva are bigger.

The effects of the Sod webworms are thin spots in turf grass or a browning which can be mistaken for summer drought or dormancy. The larval or caterpillar state is what causes the damage and this discoloration of a lawn. The larva live inside silken tunnels that they build at the base of grass plants. The larva clip the grass blades and take them back into these tunnels. So the more numerous of these larva the more thinning or damage of the turf grass. These symptoms can occur any time from May to September, however most of the time it is from June through August.

Sod webworm moths are beige, or silvery colored and have a wingspan of around three fourth of an inch to one inch. When they are at rest the insect folds its wings against its body which gives it the narrow looking appearance, and the front has a feathery, snout 'like look which is very distinctive. Since there are several species and each one can have several generations they can be seen off and on all summer, with late August or early September being a time when they are noticed. Typically they show up at dusk and fly low to the grass.

When the larva emerge from the egg they grow to about one inch long (taking 6 to 10 weeks) and are tan to light brown in color. Most of these larva this time of year will over winter in this stage and finish their live cycle next spring. The adults really do no harm and are fed on by many birds, however they are creating quite a mess around Sheridan. The presence of moths in your yard does not necessarily mean you have an infestation of larva now or next year since they can fly quite a ways and the wind can take them a long way.

There are several possible control measures that can be considered depending on one's preference. Soapy water can control the adults and the larva stage. The Bt products and beneficial nematodes will control the larva stages and are considered organic methods, however they need to be applied very early in the live cycle. Then there are the chemical control products, which are numerous. Most any insecticide product will control the larva state, including the systemic products which will give a longer period of control and are not as toxic

to beneficial insects. If you do use one of these methods it is best to not water or mow for at least 3 days so as to have these products given enough time to be effective. Make sure you follow the directions for the product you are using, so you are not contaminated or the proper amount is used to be most effective.

Of course if your lawn is looking ok, then I would not worry about treating these moths. However if your lawn looks fine now next spring look for thinning or brown or stressed areas, which could mean you have the larva stage of the Sod webworms.

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