

## Sod Webworms

The sod webworm is the larval stage of a lawn moth (sometimes called a miller) that is dingy brown with an open wingspread of about  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. When the insect is at rest, the wings are folded tightly against the body. During the day the moths are inactive and hide in shrubbery or other protected spots. In the early evening, however, they become active and fly in a jerky, zig-zag pattern over the lawn, dropping and scattering eggs while in flight.

The eggs hatch in about a week to produce the larvae, which begins to feed on grass plants almost immediately. At maturity the sod webworm is  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 in. or more long, is greenish-brown, and has stiff hairs arising from dark brown, round patches on the body. Like the moth, the webworms are active only at night, chewing grass leaves, severing the entire plant at the crown, and feeding on roots. During the day they tend to retreat to silk-like tunnels (hence the name webworm) that they have constructed in thatch or just below the soil surface.

Slightly below the soil surface the sod webworm builds a loosely woven cocoon in which it pupates and later changes to the adult, or moth, stage. The entire life cycle may be completed in less than 6 weeks; hence there may be two or more generations over the summer season.

Sod webworms seem to prefer newer lawns, which is probably a function of their arrival with a fresh-cut batch of sod. They seem to attack any type of turfgrass, but they cause the most damage in bluegrass and bentgrass. As with chinch bugs, the damage appears as irregular brown patches, but since the moth has scattered its eggs across the lawn, webworm activity does not necessarily start in the sunny, warm areas, as with the chinch bugs. It has been our experience, however, that chinch bugs and sod webworms tend to go hand in hand, frequently appearing together on a damaged lawn. Other evidence of their presence is their green-tan excrement. Birds and moles feeding on the lawn may indicate a large population.

### Symptoms:

Irregular brown patches across turf. Peel back sod on edge of damaged area and look for webworms. As with grubs, if three or more per square foot are found, consider use of an insecticide.