



Bluegrass billbug

Sphenophorus parvulus

Order Coleoptera, Family Curculionidae; snout beetles

Native pest

Pest information: Turfgrasses, stem-feeding larvae; adults on grass.

Description: Adult billbugs are long-snouted, 7 mm long, gray- to-black beetles with a strongly tapered abdomen. They can be found walking on hard surfaces in spring prior to depositing eggs in grass sheaths. The plump, legless white larvae first feed inside stems and then on crowns.

Life history: Billbugs are best controlled in May as the females are laying eggs in stems. The immature stage can also be controlled when they are feeding on the crowns. Treatment is not suggested after mid July because the larvae complete their feeding and move 1 to 2 inches into the soil to pupate. Larvae complete feeding in late July and emerge as adults in August to feed and then, overwinter in protected locations. There is usually one generation a year.

Overwintering: Adults in turf and surrounding areas.

Damage symptoms: Infested lawns have off-colored, irregularly shaped areas that rapidly yellow and finally turn brown.

Monitoring: Scout for larvae by inspecting a square foot sample of lawn along the margin where dead or damaged grass meets healthy grass. Apply adult controls when forsythia is in full bloom and flowering dogwood initiates bloom. Larval treatments are usually applied in mid May to early June. Thresholds vary depending on turf health and vigor.

Cultural control: Maintain healthy grass by fertilizing in the spring and fall and watering during periods of drought.

Chemical control: Control adults when first noticed migrating in April through May. Use pitfall traps to monitor adults or observe on warm, sunny days. Adults lay eggs in turf stems as soon as they become active. Control larvae in last week of May through first three weeks in June. Halofenozide and imidacloprid are not fast acting and are often used in areas that experienced high damage the previous year; apply from mid May until early August. Thatch reduction and good irrigation improve efficacy of insecticides. Do not use broad spectrum insecticides routinely, as they will do more harm than good and will kill the beneficial insects that live in the turf, which can cause pest outbreaks.

Biological control: Larvae have few predators as they are protected by the grass sheath.

Plant mortality risk: Medium



Bluegrass billbug adult. (271)

Photo: Vera Krischik

Biorational pesticides: *Beauveria bassiana*, halofenozide, nematodes (*Heterorhabditis bacteriophora*, *Steinernema carpocapsae*)

Conventional pesticides: adults: beta-cyfluthrin, bifenthrin, chlorpyrifos, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin; larvae: carbaryl, chlorpyrifos, imidacloprid