

White Curl Grub

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Today, I would like to talk about the destructive White Curl Grub, or cockchafer in the southern states, as we are getting close to their breeding cycle and therefore the treatment cycle. I would like to look at the Grub itself and the treatments available to eradicate and the preventive control measures for the Grub. The Curl Grub is the C-shaped larvae, of the adult beetle from the Scarabaeidae family.

Description: White and, as the name suggests, sort of curly (more C shaped to be precise) with three pairs of legs during the destructive juvenile stage.

(To the right is a photograph of the grub in its juvenile stage.)

They will grow to about 25 – 30mm in length, and is often confused with the Aussie 'witchetty grub'. As an adult scarab type beetle, often known as an African Black Beetle, as an adult they are less damaging to your plants.



Cycle: As an adult beetle, they mate and lay eggs throughout the spring. They hatch as a grub, eat through summer, pupate in autumn and rest over winter.

Likes: They can't resist the roots of potted plants (maybe because the potting mix is softer and makes for easier movement), especially when they are older larva (a teenager to be precise). When younger, they feed on decaying organic matter, which is normally connected to the root system of your plants. They especially love long periods of dry weather (these conditions also help with the main eradication method that we will cover shortly), which is the ideal conditions to feast on your plant roots.

Dislikes: Being immersed in water, they have difficulty in pupating in the wet, especially when one of the following is added to the water:

- Tea Tree Oil, add a few drops, to one litre of water,
- Bio-Degradable Detergent, add a few drops, to one litre of water, (See notes in the preventative measures section concerning this product),
- Molasses Mixture, one teaspoon to one litre of water, or
- Eco-neem, quantities as listed on the container.

Eradication: To eradicate this pest you could try one of the following methods, some methods are effective by themselves, or in conjunction with each other:

- Fill a container of water to the level of the top of the pot, then fill the pot also with water, until the potting mix is saturated, leave for a few minutes (time will of course depend on pot size, potting mix used). The grub will move to the top of the pot in an effort to escape the emergence of the water, were they can be collected for disposal. Any of the above additives may be added to terminate any

grubs missed in the saturation exercise. I like this method as there is no requirement to find that you have the grub, to take this preventative measure, or

- If you have found that you have the grub in your pots, remove the potting mix (and the grub) from your pot and re-pot the plant, with new potting mix, do not use the same mix, as the unseen larva may still be present.

Preventative measures: The use of one or more of the following measures should be employed throughout the year to control reinfestation, especially over the mid-spring to mid-summer periods:

- Neem based products, as they concentrate on chewing and sucking insects, used as a drench within the pots should control them,
- Biodegradable detergents, used as detailed above, (Note: If you try this method, make sure that the detergent you use does not contain chemicals such as fragrances, bleaches, sodium or boron as these, if used repeatedly can harm soil microbiota and increase alkalinity. Don't be tempted to use this method on garden beds.), or
- Keep your pots well irrigated, especially over spring and summer. (water restrictions permitting) as the adult doesn't like to lay eggs in wet spots.

Non-invasive measures: A method of deterring the adult beetle, from laying eggs throughout the spring in your pots, is the application of fine mulch to the tops of your exposed pots, I find the application of Lucerne chaff to the top of my pots deters the adult beetle from laying its eggs in my pots, with the added advantage of braking down to impart useful nutrients into the potting mix. Some other advantages are as follows:

- contains high levels of protein,
- provides many important minerals, including potassium, calcium, iron, folic acid,
- suppresses weeds,
- conserves moisture,
- keeps soil cool in summer and warm in winter, and
- stimulates healthy root growth,

Conclusion: The above gives methods of organic prevention and control methods to help keep the destructive juvenile curl grub at bay. Remember to make sure to apply treatments from mid-spring to mid-summer when larvae are emerging from eggs.

Hasta la vista, destructive White Curl Grub

Describe yourself: Well, I'm white and, as my name suggests, kinda curly (