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# The Root of All Weevil

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## GARDEN NOTES

# THE ROOT OF ALL WEEVIL

*By Dennis Hinkamp*

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Root weevils are oddly named because the name refers to where they live, not where they like to dine. They are infamous for just snacking on the tips and edges of the leaves, leaving a notched pattern around the edges.

Root weevils attack many different shrubs and plants, including lilacs, roses, strawberries, Euonymus, privets, yews, peonies and almost anything else growing in a landscape, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist.

“Weevils are beetles with a long nose and a bad attitude,” he says. “Their long nose or snout is the reason they are occasionally called snout beetles. The adult female lays up to 200 eggs that hatch into small ravenous larva. These larva are as destructive and annoying as the adults. The larva feed on the roots, stunting the plant by limiting the root growth. This feeding can go on for months or even years, depending upon the type of root weevil. As the larva grow they feed on bigger and bigger roots, causing more severe damage with age.”

Once the larva get large, they pupate in the soil, Goodspeed explains. After spending some time resting as a pupa, the adults emerge. They are generally black to reddish-brown, with a hard shell, a long snout and are 1/4 to 1/2 inch long.

The adults spend their time eating and growing, he says. Once they mature, the females begin the process over again by laying eggs at the base of another desirable plant. The adults can spend the winter in the soil in a protected area or under debris piled close by. The larva and eggs can also overwinter deep in the soil as they wait for the warmer spring weather.

“The cowardly adults like to feed in the dark, so they are rarely seen,” Goodspeed says. “Their favorite feeding time is from sunset to about midnight. That’s a long meal even for slow eaters.”

Controlling this pest is not easy, he adds. They are so abundant in our area that it can become a lifetime battle. Another problem with root weevil is their indiscriminate munching on almost any plant grown in the landscape. Some beneficial nematodes that feed on root weevil are sold through mail order catalogues or over the Internet. Because of their short shelf life, these nematodes are not commonly sold in local nurseries and garden centers, but it’s worth asking about them anyway.

These beneficial nematodes do not tend to survive long in our climate and soils, so they must be re-supplied to the soil to keep their numbers high and active, Goodspeed says. The jury is still out on their effectiveness at reducing root weevil populations. Many people who tried these parasites doubted whether they had any effect at all. A few who tried them reported that the damage was reduced to an acceptable level.

If they are attacking a plant with a single trunk, spray it with a sticky substance such as Tanglefoot to trap the adults as they move up the trunk, he says. It will need to be reapplied every week or two. This product will do nothing to help control the larva feeding on the roots. Keep in mind that a little root weevil damage can be tolerated, he says. However, when they begin to endanger the health and livelihood of the plant, it is time to start some control measures.

“Some registered insecticides to control adult root weevils are available at nurseries and garden centers,” Goodspeed says. “I recommend using products that have a local systemic action such as Orthene (acephate), or Pestkil Rose & Rhododendron Dust (bendiocarb). Other insecticide such as diazinon can be used around the soil to help control the larva as they feed on the roots. Ask your local nursery which products they recommend for control.”

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