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“Your Home Turf Advantage”

HOW TO GET RID OF DEW WORMS

Anybody who has encountered dew worms on their lawn knows what an annoying problem they can be. To know how to get rid of them, you first need to know what you’re dealing with...

Dew worms will live anywhere as long as there’s some moist nutritious soil they can feast on. It could be your lawn, flower beds, gardens, you name it... We’ll focus on lawns for the purposes of this article.

They are also known as “nightcrawlers”, potentially growing up to 8 inches long. They are normally found in the top 12 to 18 inches of soil and come to the surface at night and after heavy rains. They create vertical burrows as long as 6 to 10 feet, and can live up to 9 years. They come up to the surface to eat decaying plant matter or grass thatch in lawns, and also to cast off soil and waste products resulting in the unsightly mounds on your lawn.



Dew worms have natural predators such as coyotes, foxes, snakes, moles, beetles and centipedes, as well as crows, robins and other birds. However, those predators aren’t apt to help very much on a residential lawn infestation.

Of course, trying to dig out dew worms is next to impossible as they are usually too deep to reach with a shovel and they will slink away surprisingly quickly. The option of totally replacing your lawn will definitely help with eliminating your dew worm problem, but it’s best to nip this problem in the bud before it ever becomes an infestation of that magnitude.

Though there’s no one magic answer for getting rid of them, there are numerous preventative measures, that combined together, can control the problem... And if it’s controlled very well, those pesky dew worms may move elsewhere to a more favourable habitat than your own lawn.

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So what exactly do worms do that may indeed be great for the soil?

It's hard to put a good spin on this if your lawn looks like a mine field thanks to dew worms. However, it is accurate to say, their burrowing helps to aerate or churn the soil, making it more porous, thereby improving air and water infiltration. As they eat and help to break down organic matter of all sorts, they essentially accelerate decomposition and humus formation. Worms also produce copious amounts of urine containing urea, which is rapidly broken down into bio-available nitrogen for plants and grasses. Their castings (i.e. Poop, we might as well say) help to neutralize soil pH, making more basic minerals and nutrients available to plants and grasses thereby stimulating microbial populations in the soil. That all sounds good, doesn't it?

So are dew worms getting a bad rap? Well, there's a flip side to this as some of you know all too well.

THE DAMAGE THEY DO

While it's true that worms do aerate your soil, dew worms can quickly become too much of a good thing. Some people's lawns have been essentially destroyed by dew worms so it can indeed become a very serious problem if not addressed early enough.

Dew worms typically thrive in older lawns or neglected lawns, especially those with years of accumulated thatch. Thatch is the thick spongy layer of dead organic material between the grass crowns and the soil. A healthy thatch layer should be no more than ½" thick. If it's more than that, the worms are going to love it. They also love shaded, sheltered, heavily watered lawns, too. They ingest the thatch and soil, extracting the nutrients from it and excreting the rest. In a sense they're kind of like having a built-in waste collector and soil aerator, but that's not always a good thing in this case.

Their most active times are at night and early morning when the lawn is wet with dew. On the one hand their aerating abilities might be considered a great free lawn service but too much of a dew worm's good deed can make your lawn's surface intolerably bumpy.

They can potentially turn a residential lawn into a mine field of unsightly bumpy and hard mounds (their dirt and clay excrement) above ground, with deep tunnels below ground. These castings mounds tend to appear after you water your lawn or after a rainfall occurs. The mounds, which can be irritating both to walk on and mow over, are castings pushed up during the worms' burrowing and eating. While the worms won't kill your lawn, severe infestations will make it almost impossible to walk and play on as well as an unsightly mess. The clay-like substance that comes from the dew worms prevents good drainage and can also interfere with the grasses' rooting.

Additionally, if you've got a lot of earthworms in your lawn, they're likely to attract other pests such as moles which feed primarily on worms, grubs, and other below-ground creatures. Or if you're starting to notice a lot of crows or other birds on your lawn it's likely that they're enjoying the banquet table set out before them... A bunch of birds can leave quite a mess after dining on dredged up worms.

HOW TO CONTROL THEM

Underneath the castings mounds, dew worms' extensive tunnels can reach 6 to 10 feet below the surface. This inaccessibility makes them very difficult and frustrating to eliminate. If they'd only stay well below ground, it wouldn't be a problem, but once they start resurfacing your lawn with excrement mounds everywhere, that's a problem. You'll have more success focusing on controlling their numbers and the damage they do by keeping them underground. Needless to say, though they seem slow to move, dew worms are actually highly mobile and tend to populate many residential lawns in an area at a time, especially in older neighbourhoods that perhaps haven't been receiving adequate lawn care.

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If you choose to use chemicals to eliminate them, which we don't recommend, you are really only creating relief for the time being and encouraging other dew worms to move in, in their stead thereafter. But if you use the following preventative controls, you'll make your yard less appealing to dew worms in the long run.

NOTE: There's no doubt that if you look online you'll probably find people recommending other, sometimes rather unusual DIY measures they've tried themselves that seemed to work for them. For others, those same measures didn't help at all. Be careful as to what advice you heed. When it comes to lawn care and the reality that everyone's lawn is different than their neighbours, what may work for one homeowner may not work for another.

Some use electricity probes in the ground to draw them to the surface, others use hot mustard, others spray a hot soapy mixture on their lawn... Some do even stranger things... We cannot vouch for any of these measures. Some sound potentially dangerous or even poisonous.

The key for whatever you decide to do, is to be sure it doesn't create any unintended negative side effects or harm your lawn in the process, or worse yet, cause potential harm to people, animals, or birds, etc.

Also, address the potential problem sooner than later, before it becomes a dew worm infestation and your lawn is destroyed. That many dew worms and castings mounds, doesn't suddenly happen overnight... You should see it coming and have enough time to do something about it before it becomes a serious issue.

SOME EFFECTIVE PREVENTATIVE MEASURES FOR CONTROLLING DEW WORMS:

Routine lawn care & maintenance ---

- Routinely maintain your lawn... A healthy lawn is always the best defence; ensure your lawn has a high amount of organic matter.
 - Top dressing your lawn or adding organic compost periodically is recommended.
 - Also be sure to eradicate any possible fungal disease that may occasionally arise.
 - Be sure to patch up/re-seed any bare spots or damaged areas so that they re-grow again and quickly fill-in with healthy grass.
 - The facts are... a vibrant thriving lawn won't give much room for weeds to take root or for dew worms to want to make a home there.
 - It can be a lot of work if they're everywhere on your lawn but remove dew worm castings whenever you see them; rake their mounds of dirt away and discard or place them in your compost bin.

Core aeration & power raking ---

- Aerate your lawn in the spring and/or fall, and additionally power-rake it (de-thatch it) every year or two, or as often as needed.
 - When aerating, leave the cores on the surface to allow the soil organisms in the cores to help break down the thatch from the top.
 - Power-raking will reduce the thatch layer and make the surface less appealing to worms overall.
 - We offer both power raking and aeration as two of our highly effective lawn care services.

Effective watering practices ---

- Never water your lawn in the evening.
 - That's a bad habit of too many homeowners --- You do not want to leave it wet throughout the night as it can become more susceptible to fungal diseases that can potentially become a worse problem than the worms that may take up residence there in what they'll deem to be ideal wet conditions.
 - Always water first thing in the morning. Any later than that as the sun heats up and daily temperatures rise is only going to quickly evaporate any mid-day watering.

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- Only water your lawn when needed.
 - In a normal rainfall year, depending on how healthy your lawn is to begin with, a healthy lawn actually won't need a lot of supplemental watering.
 - This is usually once every 7 to 10 days wherein you put down a good ¾" to 1" of water.
 - It's always better to water less frequently but for a longer duration when watering.
 - Watering deeper and less frequently allows the top layer of the soil to dry before irrigating it again.
 - Dew worms like to live in moist but not excessively wet parts of the soil, so if the upper layers of the soil are dry, it will cause them to seek a more hospitable living situation further down in the soil, reducing the chances of them producing castings above the soil level. This has the added benefit of getting your grass's roots to grow deeper into the soil which will make it more healthy and drought-tolerant.
 - If you're watering more frequently or are daily irrigating it and have your sprinklers on for 10 to 15 minutes each time, your grass is going to have shallow roots and be more susceptible to potential fungal diseases, too.
 - If you're experiencing a rather dry season or drought conditions, watering up to twice every 7 to 10 days, for an hour or so each time, will help your lawn survive well and not be as affected by the excessive dry conditions.

Lowering the pH level ---

- A lower pH level in your soil may discourage dew worms.
 - Saline, and sandy soils, or soils with an acidic pH of 4.5 or lower tend to have few worms.
 - There are lawn care products you can buy that can be applied to the lawn a few times throughout the growing season to lower pH levels.
 - However, be careful with making your soil more acidic... Grass, like worms, has a preferred pH range and the viability of the grass is likely to be affected if its conditions are modified greatly.

Applying a thin layer of abrasive sand ---

- Dew worms hate crawling over abrasive surfaces (which is why they love wet grass at night).
 - So take advantage of that... Sprinkle a generous layer of sharp masonry sand over the affected lawn. While non-lethal, it will make them think twice about venturing to the surface and may make them decide to move elsewhere.
 - Before spreading the sand, mow your lawn to approximately a short 1½" height then top dress with about ¼" depth of dry masonry sand evenly spread, not to fully cover and lie on top of your lawn smothering it, but to fall in between the grass blades.
 - Rake it in or use a drag mat to make the sand fall into the grass and not rest on top of it.
 - This has proven to be very effective for some people.

Chemical controls or deterrents ---

- There are NO 100% effective chemical controls that have been developed which specifically target dew worms.
 - However, to eliminate mounds of castings you can spread gypsum (calcium sulphate) over the castings.
 - When this harmless chemical is spread over the affected lumpy areas, watered in and allowed to dry, any clay in the castings will become crumbly making it easier to rake out the lumps over the lawn's surface area.
- If you insist on using chemicals as a last resort (and we don't recommend it in any resort), the active ingredient carbaryl had been approved for use against dew worms.
 - That being said, most products containing carbaryl have, wisely, been banned in recent years, such as Sevin. Sevin will reduce your dew worm numbers, but even it won't entirely eliminate them.
 - It is definitely NOT safe for animals, children, or pregnant women, so we do NOT recommend this at all.

- You will also effectively wipe out the entire ecosystem of beneficial bugs, fungus, and bacteria that have built up in your yard, that you should want to keep.
- Plus, if you use Sevin or other similar chemicals, you can expect a host of other pests to make their presence known, like aphids, because you've just eliminated all their predators, and then now you may have that as the new problem to contend with.
- There are a few kinds of other insecticides and pesticides, such with formulas containing diazinon, that will kill dew worms, though it can also harm the birds that eat the worms and other insects.
- FOR ALL THE OBVIOUS REASONS WE DO NOT RECOMMEND APPLYING ANY CHEMICAL CONTROLS. The previously mentioned preventative measures are still the most effective over the long term.
- As an alternate option, there are also several kinds of animals that will eat earthworms, including ants, birds, centipedes, toads and nematodes (which are a kind of parasitic worm) that will kill the earthworms.
 - You might consider trying to draw these creatures into your yard to aid in dew worm control by growing certain kinds of plants that attract them.
 - Be careful with ants though, as they can become a serious problem, too.

*** Yes, it would be nice if we could offer you one perfect solution but as mentioned earlier, it doesn't exist. The fact is, everyone's lawns are different and what may work to varying degrees for one homeowner may not garner the same results for another. You may need to do some trial and error or combining a few approaches to get rid of your dew worm problem. However, it doesn't have to be the death knell for your lawn, especially if you address the problem early enough. Many people who have had a dew worm problem have been able to get rid of their worms.

As we've always said, which is key to just about every potential problem a lawn may ever encounter, routine lawn care and maintenance will help create a healthy lawn which is always the best defence.

*** **SPECIAL NOTE** ***

We love helping our clients have great-looking lawns! Of course, we always welcome your inquiries, but we also want to help educate you, too. So many of you have told us how much you appreciate the articles we make available to you.

If there are any questions you may have about your lawn or any challenges or problems you may occasionally encounter with your lawn, don't hesitate to give us a call. As with the above info article you've just read, we also have other highly beneficial lawn care articles, too...

Here are some we've created to support you with your lawn care efforts. They can help you identify any problems as well as offer some possible solutions for some of those occasional challenges lawns can encounter.

These info articles are not meant to be one-time definitive cures for whatever might ail your lawn. We all wish it was only that simple... But, there are no magic "spray this once and your lawn will be perfect thereafter" solutions... Unfortunately, those don't really exist, as much as we might all like them to. However, there are many things you can do to get your lawn in great shape and keep it that way. We encourage you to glean what you can from any of the following articles that may interest you. And for what you're not sure about, give us a call, let's talk about it, and we'll do what we can to help you.

You may reach us at 780-678-6450 if you'd like to receive any of these via email. It would be our pleasure to do our part to help you "make your lawn the envy of your neighbours"...

...See list of available articles on next page...

"Your Home Turf Advantage"

From Our **“PROACTIVE LAWN CARE”** Series Of Articles —

7 Steps To A Great Lawn

Caring For Our Lawn Over The Winter

Proactively Preparing Your Lawn For Drought Conditions

From Our **“WHAT YOU’RE NOT TOLD”** Series Of Articles —

What You’re Not Told About All-Natural & Organic Lawn Care Alternatives

What You’re Not Told About Bats & Their Guano

From Our **“WHY?”** Series Of Articles —

Why Is My Grass So Thin?

Why Dead Spots On My Lawn?

Why Am I Getting Mushrooms In My Lawn?

Why Are The Pine Needles Killing My Grass?

From Our **“HOW TO GET RID OF...”** Series Of Articles —

How To Get Rid of Ants

How To Get Rid of Dew Worms

How To Get Rid of Fairy Rings

How To Get Rid of Quackgrass

How To Get Rid of Thistles

From Our **“DAMAGE BY DOGS & OTHER CRITTERS”** Series of Articles —

Fixing & Preventing Dog Spots

Damage Caused by Voles

From Our **“SEEDING LAWNS”** Series Of Articles —

Grass Seeding For New Lawns

Overseeding For Existing Lawns

From Our **“DIY”** Series Of Articles —

DIY_Alternate Ways To Remove Weeds In Gravel Areas

From Our **“COMMON LAWN FUNGAL DISEASES”** Series Of Articles —

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases (Compendium Of All Common Ones)

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_The Usual Causes

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Snow Mold

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Leaf Spot & Melting Out

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Ascochyta Turf Leaf Blight

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Brown Patch

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Summer Patch

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Pythium Blight

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Red Thread

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Rust Diseases

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Powdery Mildew

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Dollar Spot

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Fairy Ring

...See more on next page...

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INFORMATION ON OUR FIVE PRIMARY LAWN CARE SERVICES —

FERTILIZER & WEED CONTROL:

Our Fertilization & Weed Control Program
Possible Reasons For Still Having Weeds
Ten Reasons Our Program is Different

ENRICH SOIL ENHANCER:

Our Enrich Soil Enhancer Program
Different Soil Types Have Different pH Levels

WEEKLY MOWING:

How The Weekly Lawn Mowing Works
Our Quality Control Program
Ten Reasons We Are Different

CORE AERATION:

Why Aerate Your Lawn?

POWER RAKING:

Why Power-Rake Your Lawn?