

Fall Armyworm Biology:

Fall armyworms periodically cause extensive damage to turfgrass areas and pastures across the United States. Small female moths lay up to 1,000 eggs in masses of up to 50 eggs each. Such large numbers of resulting caterpillars can quickly defoliate turf areas and hay fields.

Egg laying activity usually starts in June across much of the southern United States, and swarms of caterpillars may destroy large turf areas in only a matter of days. After feeding for 2 to 3 weeks, the caterpillars will dig into the top inch of soil and begin to pupate. The pupae will eventually give rise to a new generation of moths in around two weeks, which then go on to lay more eggs. Across most of the south, there may be several generations of fall armyworms in a year.

The photo below shows the distinctive inverted “Y” pattern on the head capsule of a fall armyworm.



(Photo by Syngenta Seedcare)

What can be done about fall armyworms?

Unfortunately, when damage becomes noticeable it is usually severe, due to the rapid feeding of such large numbers of caterpillars. If damage is still in progress, the caterpillars will be found along the edges of damaged areas, still feeding on green tissue. If caterpillars are not found, treating for them may not be ineffective, since they may already be pupating and the pupae do not feed at all. Fortunately, there are numerous effective insecticides that will control the insects once they are found, as long as they are still feeding. Additionally, the damage caused by fall armyworms is only to above ground plant parts, so turfgrasses can be brought back to a healthy stand with proper watering and fertilization.



(Photo by North Carolina State University)

If you notice fall armyworms actively feeding on your lawn, please call your BrightView Account Manager as soon as possible. Treating this pest with an insecticide can prevent large amounts of damage, and we can assist with turf recovery right away.