



European Chafer Beetles Running Amok in Seattle?

By: Paige Embry 4/3/2026



European Chafer Beetle damage, my neighborhood in Seattle, minor on left, significantly worse on right, in fall 2025

The lawn was in trouble, but you didn't realize it until the end of summer or early fall when the crows descended and began ripping up plugs of grass with what looked like glee. There may have been portents earlier in the year, brown patches in the grass that could be put down to the lawn just needing a little TLC and soon you'd:

- 1) de-thatch,
- 2) aerate,
- 3) fertilize,
- 4) overseed,
- 5) check the irrigation system because the watering seemed spotty,

- 6) water the lawn for a change this year, or
- 7) all of the above.

In scattered areas along the I-5 corridor in Washington,¹ the crows delighted destruction of lawns likely means that the larvae of European chafer beetles (*Amphimallon majale*) lurk below.* These immature beetles (larvae, aka grubs) eat the grass roots and the crows find these fine, fat, protein morsels and thank you for the all-you-can buffet by wreaking a bit of havoc. The crows (or raccoons or other hungry beasties) won't stop as long as the larvae live and prosper.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE EUROPEAN CHAFER BEETLES



Bruce Watt, Bugwood.org

Beetles, like butterflies and some other insects, go through complete metamorphosis: egg, larva (=caterpillar for butterflies and moths), pupa, adult. The adult European chafer beetles (EC) emerge in late spring/early summer, fly, mate, deposit eggs, and die. The eggs hatch into larvae which have exoskeletons that they need to shed periodically to grow. Each version between those molts is called an instar; EC have three. From late summer/early fall until mid to late spring the next year, they are in their large, easily visible, 3rd instar form. (See photo.) They pupate

between April and early June,² making the radical change from crawling grub to winged adult.

During that 3rd instar period, it's easy to find out if EC are in a lawn. Go dig down several inches where the crows were partying, or in a still green area next to a brown one. If you come across whitish, C-shaped grubs with strange-looking heads, they're probably EC. The heads are small, smooth and tan/brown and look like someone lopped them off some other creature and glued them onto the bulbous white bodies. The grubs have 3 pairs of legs clustered right up near the head. The opposite end is blackish-brown. As the grubs eat the grass roots, they also eat soil and you can see it through the exoskeleton. Other insects in our area that feed on turf include European crane flies and [cutworms](#).³ (See similar beetles with id pictures [here](#).)⁴



EC larva with dirt accumulation in its hind end.

Around here, adult EC fly from late spring to early/mid-July. They are drably beetle-ish, ~1/2" long and brown, although sometimes with a nice golden or reddish tone. You probably won't notice them. They come out at sunset, forming a mating swarm in the trees before the females settle on items silhouetted against the still light-washed sky. The males follow, jostling for the chance to

mate.² Preliminary research at two golf courses in Seattle had the adults flying between May 2 and July 9.⁵

IF YOU HAVE THEM, WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

EC are new to our area. They were first seen on the west coast in 2001 (in British Columbia), found in Washington in 2008, and had established populations around Seatac by 2016.²

Are these new arrivals dire enemies or merely disruptive neighbors? Do they call for all out war or only some accommodations to make living with them easier because, be sure, EC are here to stay. Since they are so new to the west coast, I looked to the east coast, where they were found in the 1940s, for insights into how they live.

A 1969 [paper](#)⁶ by a group of entomologists in New York State summarized just about everything a person might want to know about EC—what they ate, the problems they caused, the intricacies of their live cycle, what could be done about them. They went deep, deep into the weeds. For example, the authors state that newly deposited eggs are “shiny, milky white, ellipsoidal” but become dull gray as they age. They note that the outermost part of the egg stretches as the embryo grows and this stretchiness, “makes the eggs resilient, and they can bounce like rubber balls from a hard surface without injury.” The authors also write that each egg is deposited in a little chamber created by the “extrusion and evagination of the vagina to form a bulbous organ.” An EC female turns her vagina inside out and sort of punches out a tiny baby bedroom with it. Ouch.

The paper is full of potentially useful nuggets, three key ones:

1) The “population density” of larvae was higher in drier soil. Where the ground was quite wet (averaging 90% of field capacity over larval life) there were ~2 grubs/yd² when field capacity averaged between 41% and 65% there were 23-85 grubs/yd². (Understanding field capacity [here](#)⁷



From University of Maine Cooperative [Extension](#)

and [here](#).⁸) 2)The researchers did two studies on where females preferred to deposit their eggs: short grass vs long and grass vs bare ground. EC preferred the short grass (20.9 grubs/ft²) over long (11.9) and seemed to hate bare ground with only 0.3 grubs/ft² vs 12.9 in the grass.

3) Pupae were “tender” (presumably they didn’t bounce). A couple of days of soils saturated from rain “may nearly eliminate the population.”

Combining what has been found elsewhere (not just NY) with what has been gleaned locally, what do we know that might be useful?

In a land where many lawns are left to go summer-dormant, and hell strips tend to be grassy zones of neglect, the big takeaway is these areas will be havens for EC. Healthy, well-watered, well-fertilized lawns are more likely to be safe from the beetles and the destruction wrought by hungry crows, raccoons and others. (See [video](#)² and references^{9,10} below on lawn care.)

Monitor (=dig around periodically) for pupae starting in mid-April. (In NY, they could be up to 10" deep.) Pupae are nearly straight (~16mm, 2/3" long),⁶ larvae are curved in a C. (In NY, the pre-pupal + pupal period lasted ~ 2 to 3 weeks.) Once you find pupae, consider watering heavily for a few days in a row to try and kill off some of those tender pupae. Keep soils moist throughout the entire egg deposition period.

Also, the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food has some commonsense advice, "Do not remove soil from infested areas, as chafer can be spread to new areas by movement of infested soil. Do not bring plants in from infested areas."¹¹

POTENTIAL ACTION PLANS

Plan 1: Remove the lawn. You've now removed the food source for the larvae, and therefore, the crows and their hungry friends. (The larvae *have* been known to eat other roots, but it seems to be a desperation move.^{3,11} You could wait to replant until the larvae are dead or gone.) Consider it an opportunity to try something new--you could even thank the crows for doing a good chunk of the pesky lawn removal for you.

Plan 2: Treat your lawn like you love it (and cross your fingers). Water, fertilize, aerate, etc. Appreciate its cool greenness under bare feet. Watch the WSU [video](#)² and check out the links below on lawn care. Monitor. WSU researchers note that 5-10 grubs/square ft² "warrant management tactics."² Look to Plan 3 (or Plan 1 if you've had enough).

Plan 3: Engage in battle. Options include parasitic nematodes, *Bacillus thuringiensis subsp. galleriae* (Btg) and chemical insecticides. Using these correctly is critical. The Master Gardeners have a [guide](#)¹² and I've listed other links below that have resources on what to use and how and when to use them if you go that route. Realize that you may drive the EC away from your lawn, but they'll be around, so you'll still want to engage in Plan 2 activities. Keep monitoring.

Good luck. For a while, I was in a Sun Tze "know your enemy to defeat them" kind of place with respect to EC, but the bouncy eggs and the inside out vaginas made me see EC as rather wondrous. Nevertheless, I found a Sun Tzu quote that embodies my attitude toward pest- and disease-prone plants, "If a battle cannot be won, do not fight it." In this instance, it's easy for me to say. I have no lawn.

* Japanese beetles--a much more serious problem-- have been found in various areas around SeaTac. The larvae also infest lawns and look similar to those of EC. If Japanese beetles have been found near you, the state offers free treatment. See here. I'll write about Japanese beetles soon. WSDA [website](#) on treatment areas. Here's a fact [sheet](#) and other WSDA [resources](#).

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