



What's Your Threshold?



Using a golf course cup changer is a good way to monitor root-feeding grubs such as the Black Turfgrass Ataenius (*Ataenius spretulus*).

A key component of IPM is identifying a *threshold level* for when to deal with pests and diseases. A threshold is that point at which a stimulus—an insect or disease for example—is just strong enough to produce a response. In other words, at what point do you take action?

Your answer likely depends on your personality, your property, the pest itself, and the particular plants affected. Review potential problems in terms of these factors and evaluate treatment options that allow you to effectively deal with actual damage instead of unrealistic demands, perceptions, or fear.

- **The personal:** We all have different tolerances for living with insects or plant diseases. Do you get out the bug spray at the sight of a fly? Are you like the old lady who would swallow a bird to catch the spider to catch the fly? What level of perfection in your home and landscape do you expect? Is it realistic? At what cost?
- **The property:** Some properties demand a high degree of maintenance; every weed and imperfection must be eliminated. Is this realistic? Does your property demand a swift response at the first sign of trouble, or can you accept a degree of pest activity, even damage?
- **The pest:** Some pests spell trouble at first sight, while others can be tolerated even in relatively high numbers. It's important to evaluate the pest in the context of its life cycle, habits, and ability to do damage.
- **The plant:** Most plants can tolerate some degree of damage from insects and disease. The healthier the plant, the greater its ability to withstand pest activity and recover from damage. As part of your integrated pest management plan, you'll need to determine what level of pest activity or damage the plant can tolerate before taking action (*e.g.*, six to 10 white grubs found per square foot of turf, five to 10 sod webworms per square foot).

Think of thresholds as *action levels* that provide a tangible basis for pest management decisions. The goal of corrective measures used is to bring the disease or insect *below the threshold, not necessarily eliminate it*. Audubon International staff, the USGA Turf Advisory Service, or your local Cooperative Extension service can provide you with additional information on setting threshold levels and can refer you to local experts to help you.

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