

Leatherjackets



The larvae of the crane fly (daddy-long-legs) can devastate strawberry, raspberry and blackberry crops. Attacks are worse on recently dug grassed areas and less severe in light, dry soils and in hot, dry years. The adult crane fly lays its eggs in turf or on the surface of the soil from late summer to autumn. These hatch a few weeks later when the young leatherjackets emerge to begin feeding on the roots of plants over winter.

DAMAGE:

The legless, fat earth-coloured grubs are up to 30mm long, without obvious heads. They feed below soil level on the shoots of newly planted raspberry canes and the crowns of strawberry plants. Damage is most

evident in the spring when infested plants make poor growth and may begin to wilt.

CONTROL:

There are no chemicals that can be used by gardeners for control of this pest.

Leatherjackets can be collected by covering small areas of the ground with black polythene overnight after heavy rain or irrigation. The grubs will come up to the surface and can be removed the next morning when the polythene is lifted.

Leatherjackets can be controlled biologically with the nematode *Steinernema feltiae* (Nemasys Leatherjacket Killer). This can be applied from late August until the end of October (two weeks after flight of the first crane flies) when young leatherjackets are active in the soil and the soil temperature is above 12°C (54°F). The nematode takes two to three weeks to work. Natural predators are available from Green Gardener (Tel: 01493 750061).