

Ground Pearls in Lawns and Turf

Ground Pearls are tiny soil-dwelling insects that attack grass roots. They are related to scale insects and are most damaging in their 'pearl' stage, where they form shiny, metallic cysts underground.

Where Are They Found?

In Australia, Ground Pearls are found in Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia. They are serious pests on golf courses and bowling greens, a moderate problem in home lawns, and a significant pest of sugarcane in Queensland.

Why Are They a Problem?

Ground Pearls feed by sucking sap from roots, causing turf to weaken and thin out. Because they live underground in hard cysts, they are hard to spot and spread slowly, but they can cause lasting damage.

How to Identify Them

Stage	What They Look Like
Adult Females	3–5 mm long, pink or cream, bead-shaped.
First Instar Nymphs	Tiny 'crawlers', 0.2 mm long, move to find roots.
Second Instar Nymphs	Round cysts, 1–4 mm across, shiny and metallic. These cause the damage.

Life Cycle

- In spring and summer, adult females leave cysts and lay eggs 25 cm underground in wax-lined chambers.
- Each female lays up to 100 eggs (White Ground Pearl) or 600 eggs (Pink Ground Pearl).
- Eggs hatch into crawlers that move to roots, then become cysts.
- Cysts can survive 2–5 years, depending on conditions.

Best Management Practices

Currently, there is only one product registered for Ground Pearl control (Scarlet Trio). The best strategy is prevention and good lawn care:

- Dig out adults and cysts in affected areas and re-turf.
- Keep turf healthy with regular mowing, watering, and fertilising.
- Apply balanced NPK fertilisers to strengthen turf.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Ground Pearls are soil-dwelling pests related to scale insects.
- ✓ They spread slowly but weaken turf over time.
- ✓ The only chemical registered for them is Scarlet Trio.
- ✓ Infestations are most common in Queensland, NSW, and WA.