



# BUG BIZ

Pest Management and Insect Identification Series



## Wireworms Worldwide Destructive Pests



Wireworms are found throughout North America and most of the world. They are among the most difficult and destructive pests to control and most widespread pests of corn, sod, small grains, sugarcane, potatoes, root crops and vegetables.

In Louisiana, wireworms can be found in newly established vegetable crop sites where sod or weeds had been growing for years. Wireworms are attracted to those grassy areas and remain in the soil until their life cycle is completed, causing serious injury to vegetable crops for one to six years.

Wireworms thrive even in intensely managed and cultivated vegetable plots. They injure plants by feeding on the roots and tubers or by tunneling the stems of growing plants, such as tomatoes and eggplants. Serious injury is caused by their habit of feeding on newly planted seeds, such as peas and beans.

### Description

The most observed form is the larval stage. The larva is wormlike and cylindrical about ½ to 1½ inches long, with a shiny, hard, yellowish-brown skin. The adults are beetles, commonly called click beetles, vary in color from

black, gray or brown and are about ½ to 1 inch or more in length. The adults are nondescript (see drawing) and are usually not associated with the larval stage or the injury caused.

### Life History and Habits

Many different species attack cultivated crops. They usually spend the winter in the larval or adult stage in the soil. In early spring the adults emerge and fly about. The thorax and abdomen of these pests are connected by a joint that is loose and flexible. When the beetles are placed on or fall on their backs, they snap this region against the ground and throw themselves into the air. They continue this popping or snapping action until they land on their feet and then scurry off. This feature has amused those who have seen it and has given the beetle the nickname of click beetle, snapping beetle or ship-jacks.

The adults live 10 to 12 months. Most of this time and all of the other stages are spent in the soil. The egg stage lasts from a few days to a few weeks. The larvae hatching from these eggs spend from one to six years in the soil feeding on roots or seeds of plants. In hot weather the larvae bore down in the soil and are hard to find even in heavily infested fields. At maturity, the larva forms a cell in the soil and pupates. The adult develops a few weeks later and remains in the soil until the following spring.

Although there is only one generation a year, nearly all sizes of larvae can be found in the soil at any one time because of the overlapping of generations. Larvae move only short distances in the soil, and adults often remain to lay their eggs in the areas where they developed.



*Click beetles (wireworm adults)*  
Photo by: Steve Brown, UGA

### Methods of Control

Cultural controls are difficult to apply to wireworms because of their long life cycle. In colder climates, summer plowing followed by winter cultivation helps expose and destroy adults and larvae. Crop rotation with noninfested plants on a two-year basis is effective for some species, but some species prefer cultivated land, so crop rotation is valueless in Louisiana.

In small home gardens, trapping wireworm larvae has been effective for evaluating wireworm numbers. Baits (like fermented corn, peas,

beans, cull potatoes or stiff flour dough) placed 2 to 4 inches deep at intervals of 10 feet in a garden (several locations per acre) actively attract wireworms. These baits, covered with tile or boards and dug up after a week, are good indications of wireworm numbers.

Chemical control measures are effective, inexpensive and easy to apply. They do not require keeping the land out of production. Applying pesticides as dust, granules or sprays and lightly working them into the ground one to two weeks before planting will control wireworms effectively.



*Damage to Peanuts*  
*Photo by: Steve Brown, UGA*

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