



## Rhodie Woes: Root Weevils

When we think of insect pests of rhododendrons, probably the first one to come to mind is the root weevil. Root weevils spend the majority of their lives underground as larvae. These little (about 1/2 inch) grubs love to feed on the roots of the plant and can actually girdle the roots to the extent that the rhodie will die. To identify a grub dug up at the base of the plant, you would note that they are white in color, have no legs, have a small black head and are curved into a fat "comma" shape. Other than the sickliness of the plant, and the telltale notching of leaves by the adult weevils, you would not know they were present until it is too late. If you see notched leaves, it is a good idea to do an exploratory dig to see just how many of the larvae are present. If there are many, a control measure is probably warranted.

Adults feed at night, and you can explore your plants in the evening with a flashlight to see if the chewings truly are weevils or one of several other pests. The adults emerge in May and June and are typical beetles, with a brownish-gray color on their bodies and a grayish head and prothorax. They are about 3/8 - 1/2 inch long. If you find adults, you can easily take them off the leaves and dispose of them. A former extension agent used to say she really enjoyed going out, finding the adults and destroying 'em. She said there is something extremely satisfying about the "pop" that they make as you squish 'em! You know you are in control!

Control measures can be very effective for the larvae. Probably the most effective and least invasive is the use of beneficial nematodes. The solution of nematodes is poured at the base of the plant and the tiny worms invade and kill the weevil grubs. Hand picking for the adults is rather laborious, but the adventure of going out at night with a flashlight on a "snipe" hunt takes us back to our pleasant experiences of childhood. Otherwise, several chemicals are listed in the PNW Insect Control Handbook (look under "Andromeda"). Please use with care and be sure to follow directions! Most of these poisons will kill beneficials as well as the intended beetles, so they should be used as a last resort!

If you choose to utilize the "search and destroy" method, good hunting! Hopefully, you do not have a root weevil problem and will not need any of the chemical controls! Many of our clients will not be as lucky and will need all the information they can get.

