

## Root Weevil Control for Rhododendrons

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Root weevils are crawling insects that notch the leaves of rhododendrons and other ornamental plants. While this causes an unsightly appearance, more damage is done by the larval stage of the weevil, while they are underground feeding on roots. The larvae hatch into adults in the summer. They then feed and lay eggs and become larvae again. Going untended, root weevil larvae can eventually cause enough damage to the roots to cause the plant to die.

There are over a dozen different types of root weevils native to our part of the world, which has different life cycles. The most common are the black vine or strawberry root weevil, which hatch one or two times a year. They live in the forest munching on salal, cedar, berries, rhododendrons and other native plants.

Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens uses beneficial nematodes to control the larvae of root weevils. Beneficial nematodes are microscopic predators that feed on the larvae of many insects: weevils, fleas, cutworms, sawflies, etc.

The soil and weather conditions must be right for beneficial nematodes to be effective. Briefly: the soil must be 50-52 degrees F (depending on what strain of beneficial nematode you use). This usually occurs at Meerkerk Gardens anywhere from late April to early June. Nematodes can be applied again in the autumn, while the soil is still warm and moisture is present, via rain or watering.

Just before you want to use them, mix up the amount you will need to treat the area and mix them up with water in a watering can or in a sprayer. If using a sprayer, remove the strainer so as not damage the nematodes. Apply nematodes to moist soil and on a cloudy day or in the evening, as they are sensitive to ultra violet light.

If you have thick mulch around your rhodies, it would be helpful to pull back the mulch to apply the nematodes, then re-mulch after applying them.

Branches that touch the ground act as bridges for nematodes to climb onto the foliage. Prune them up off the ground to limit the weevil's access. A sticky glue, like Tanglefoot can be applied on top of a band of light plastic around the trunk of the shrub, to trap crawling adults. (Tanglefoot applied directly to bark may injure it.)

If using a chemical control, contact your local Extension Agent for their recommendation. There are sprays and baits available for adult weevil control. Always follow label instructions and wear protective equipment like goggles, gloves and a mask.

For more information on rhododendrons and azaleas, please refer to the WSU publication #1229: How to Identify Rhododendrons & Azalea Problems. WSU order information, phone: (509) 335-2857

Beneficial nematodes are available at your local nursery, usually at the time to apply, or by mail order.