

November 10, 2003  
Purple Fountain Grass

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Field Visit

## The Case of the Missing Roots



**Situation:** A customer from Cape Coral called stating that her container grown purple fountain grass, *Pennisetum setaceum*, were no more than hay stacks in pots. I arrived at the location to find three containers grown purple fountain grass all dead, and all easily removed from the containers, and all with no roots. A quick search of the soil medium unearthed numerous large grubs. Several live grubs were sent to the University of Florida Insect Identification Laboratory in Gainesville for proper identification.

**The Results:** The Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines a grub as a soft thick wormlike larva of an insect. In this case the insect was identified as *Tomarus subtropicus* or sugarcane grub. This grub was previously reported in Charlotte, Alachua, Hillsborough, Manatee, Palm Beach, Pinellas and Sarasota Counties. It is a root feeder. It is damaging to ornamental plants and some other crops. The adult is a beetle believed native to the Caribbean and was first reported in Florida in 1964.



**The Control:** Treat containers with Sevin or with products containing trichlorfon or permethrin. You may also treat and then discard the soil-mix in doubled plastic bags and place the content outside for trash pick-up. Afterwards, scour the containers and refill them with store-bought soil-mix. Be sure the containers do not touch the soil.

**Memo:** Always follow label rates and recommendations when using pesticides. Test spray new pesticides or pesticides new to your yard/facility on a small scale to check for plant safety before widespread use.