

Farmer Fact Sheet 29: Sweet Potato Weevil



What is it?

It is an insect that feeds on sweet potato roots and vines. The scientific name is *Cylas*.

What damage does it do?

The adults feed on the buds, leaves, vines, but the damage is small. The grubs or larvae do most damage as they feed on the storage roots (photo, right). The females crawl through cracks in the soil to reach the storage roots and to lay their eggs. They also lay their eggs in the base of the vines.

How do I identify it?

Look at the base of the plant for damage to the stem. Break the stem open to see if there are tunnels, rots and grubs. Dig up a root and look for damage to the skin; cut the root and check if there are grubs and feeding tunnels. Adult beetles (photo, left) are most active at night, but can sometimes be seen on plants during the day.

How do I manage the weevil?

- Crop rotation: Grow sweet potatoes in a field only once every 3-4 years, and plant far away from crops with weevil;
- Planting material: Select tip cuttings (25-30 cm long) from fresh young vines. NEVER use old parts of the vine that may have weevil eggs and grubs in them;
- Plant cuttings deep in the soil and use deep-rooted varieties;
- Hill up and mulch: Prevent the soil from cracking by hilling soil around the plant;
- Spread mulch to keep the soil moist;
- Harvest the crop as soon as it has developed sizeable roots;
- Hygiene: Destroy any crop residues left in the field after harvest - IMPORTANT;
- Chemical: Commercial growers who need to use insecticides should see their MAL extension officer for assistance. Note, insecticides will also kill weevils' enemies - ants, beetles, earwigs and spiders.