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A palmetto weevil grub and pupa inside a bored out Canary Island date palm frond base (boot).



Adult weevils have a snout with chewing mandibles at the tip. Body color varies from black to red.

Palmetto weevil

Rhynchophorus cruentatus

This is one of Florida's largest weevils, with adults topping out at a little over 1 inch in length. They come in various shades of black and red. Weevils are the group of beetles that have a snout or proboscis with the chewing mouthparts at the end.

The grub or larva is the damaging stage as it bores into and destroys the heart or bud of the palm. The grub is "Crocodile Dundee" appetizer fare, tipping in at a juicy two tenths of an ounce and at 1 1/2 inches long and a girth of 3/4 inch. It is creamy white to yellowish and legless with a brown head.

It doesn't take too long before the large tunnels it drills into the "boots" or petiole bases and the main bud kill the palms. Adults are attracted to stressed palms such as newly transplanted specimens. Palms that are attacked include: Canary Island and date palms, cabbage palmetto and saw palmetto, and it is less frequently found on Bismarck, Caryota, coconut, Pritchardia, royal, Latania and Washingtonia.

Look for decline of younger leaves on palmetto. With Canary Island date palm, look for the older fronds to droop and quickly collapse. Eventually, the top of the palm will plop over, a condition called "popped neck," which equals dead.

The weevil activity peaks in the spring and flight activity drops off during November through February. However, with expensive and stressed Canary Island date palms, one should look at the possibility of a weevil attack occurring any time of the year. Once a palm is infested, pesticides are of no avail and the palm should be removed.

Preventive applications with a permethrin product available to professionals may help. But it is expensive and will require repeated applications as the residue is effective for about ten to twelve weeks.

For more information on Home Gardening, contact the Collier County Extension, Master Gardener Plant Clinic (239) 353-2872. The Plant Clinic is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 9AM to Noon and 1PM to 4PM.

See the Web site: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN139> for more information.