Learn common lawn insects

There are three things to know before worrying about lawn insects.

First, know the kind of grass you have. Some of these critters are picky and feed on only one type of grass while others feed on any of the lawn grasses.

Second, know time of year the insects are active in our area. You then know when to start looking for signs of insect activity.

Third, learn scouting techniques for the lawn insects you are likely to find in your yard. Scouting involves monitoring for insects and making decisions on when control measures are justified.

Mole crickets may injure any of the lawn grasses we grow in Florida. Bermuda, bahia and centipede are most severely damaged.

Mole crickets can be active in North Florida lawns spring through fall. The best window of opportunity to control them is in June and July.

Soap flush is a technique to survey for mole crickets. Simply mix two ounces of liquid dishwashing soap in two gallons of water and apply with a sprinkling can to four square feet of turf in several areas where mole crickets are suspected. If an average of two to four mole crickets surface within three minutes, treatment is probably needed.

Chinch bugs only damage St. Augustinegrass. They may be active as early as April but are more likely found during warmer summer weather through fall. They prefer open sunny, dry areas of the yard.

Inspect a St. Augustine lawn weekly during spring, summer and fall. Look for areas that quickly turn yellow and then straw brown. Part the grass at the margin of yellowed areas and closely examine the soil surface and base of the turf for tiny insects. Immature chinch bugs are pink to bright red and are about the size of a pinhead. Adults are about 1/8 or 1/10 inch long and black with white wings. Treatment may be necessary if twenty chinch bugs are found per square foot.

Spittlebugs attack all turfgrass species but centipedegrass seems to be their favorite. The first generation is abundant in June and the peak population is usually in August to early September.

An early sign of spittlebug activity are masses of white, frothy spittle found in the turf. Each piece of spittle contains a single larva. Infested turf turns yellow and eventually brown. Damage resembles chinch bug injury but usually first appears in shady areas. As you walk through or mow an infested area, numerous ¼ inch adult spittlebugs fly for a short distance. Adults are black with two orange transverse stripes across their wings.

For more on maintaining a Florida lawn, visit http://yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu.

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