Chinch bugs active in local lawns

Chinch bugs have been active in St. Augustinegrass lawns.

They prefer St. Augustinegrass and rarely bother our other lawngrass species. I’ve never seen them as a problem in any of our other lawngrases. Even where St. Augustinegrass and centipedegrass are growing intermingled, I’ve only seen them affecting the St. Augustinegrass.

Many people will misdiagnose the problem because they are not looking for something as small as chinch bugs.

Adult chinch bugs are about 1/10 of an inch in length and are black with white wings. The nymphs (immature chinch bugs) are reddish with a white band across the back and are about 1/20 of an inch in length after hatching. The nymphs become black as they mature.

Because drought stress can promote chinch bug problems, irrigate your lawn with ¾ of an inch of water when it begins to show signs of water need. Do not irrigate again until wilting begins to occur. Visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Lawn_Watering for details on lawn irrigation.

The kind and amount of fertilizer affects grass growth and possibly chinch bug activity. You can reduce grass growth rate and possible chinch bug problems simply by using minimum applications of a slow release nitrogen fertilizer as compared to frequent doses of a water soluble inorganic nitrogen fertilizer. One to two applications of a slow release lawn fertilizer per year may be sufficient in order to produce an attractive St. Augustine lawn.

By limiting insecticide use, you can encourage valuable beneficial insects that will help you battle chinch bugs. The black big-eyed bug and the earwig are great allies. These two insects consume large numbers of chinch bugs.

During late spring through early fall, inspect your St. Augustine lawn frequently for signs of chinch bug damage. As they feed, chinch bugs quickly cause yellowish to brownish patches in the grass. Because other factors may cause similar symptoms, it’s important to identify the true cause.

If chinch bugs are found, start control measures promptly. Many lawn insecticides list chinch bugs on their label. It’s best to use a product that can be applied in a hose-end-sprayer verses a granular application when targeting chinch bugs. Always read and follow label directions before using any pesticide.

To avoid unnecessary environmental contamination and a reduction in beneficial insects, early spot treatments can be applied while infestations are still small. Treat the
off-color areas and about a ten-foot buffer zone around each. A few days later, check for effective control. If damage is widespread, the entire yard may need to be treated.

Visit [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH036](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH036) for more information on chinch bugs.

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