

CHINCH BUGS MAKING THEMSELVES KNOWN IN AREA ST. AUGUSTINE GRASS LAWNS

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All over Charlotte County I have seen the telltale signs - yellowing and dead patches in St. Augustine grass lawns. Are there spots in your St. Augustine grass that are yellow or dead and almost appear to be drought-damaged? Is the yellow or dead spot getting larger? Suspect chinch bugs!

The southern chinch bug is a tiny insect barely one-tenth of an inch long. The adults are black and white with shiny white folded wings. The baby chinch bugs are more colorful with reddish-orange bodies and a white band across the back. It takes chinch bugs about three weeks from the time the eggs hatch to maturity with seven to ten generations per year. All chinch bugs have a straw-like mouthpart that is used to pierce and suck fluids from the grass plants. Their feeding activity causes the grass to yellow and die.

Before you suspect chinch bugs, make sure to eliminate other factors that could cause your grass to yellow and die. Consider that diseases and nutritional issues can also cause turf damage. To check for and detect a chinch bug infestation, find a suspected yellowing patch of grass and check the stems and soil surface. You need to look closely, but chinch bugs can be seen with the naked eye. I have

had no problem finding these insects, but you have to get down on their level. A more high-tech idea is to use a hand-held

St. Augustine grass yard killed by southern chinch bugs

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vacuum cleaner. Check the filter for any chinch bugs collected.

Once you have identified the pest, what options are open to you to control chinch bugs? Cultural controls can help reduce the damage that chinch bugs may cause. Rapid growth of succulent grass tissue can result from too much nitrogen fertilizer. This excess growth may enhance the development of chinch bugs. A better choice is a slow-release nitrogen (50%) fertilizer which will produce steady, less succulent growth. Another consideration involves reducing the development of thatch. Thatch is a layer of dead roots and stems where chinch bugs tend to hang out. Being careful not to over-water and/or over-fertilize, coupled with proper mowing height, will help reduce thatch and subsequent chinch bug problems.

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com. Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

*contact a
MASTER GARDENER
on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 764.4340 or by email Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com.*

*You can also visit them at one of our many Plant Clinics around the county:
<http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/PlantClinics.pdf>*

Another good suppression technique is the use of biological controls. Earwigs, parasitic wasps, spiders, and big-eyed bugs are all biological controls that tend to co-exist in turf along with their food source - chinch bugs. Preserving these natural controls is best realized by using insecticides sparingly and only when necessary.

Full management of chinch bugs often requires insecticides. One unfortunate fact to keep in mind is that a number of chinch bug populations are resistant to every major chemical class of insecticides. Accordingly, rotation of insecticides with different modes of action will help increase your control success. Early monitoring and identification will allow you to direct spot treatments. More widespread damage will require a larger treatment area. As with all pesticides, read the label - it is the law! There are a number of insecticides labeled for chinch bug control. For a complete list, please check the web link at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH036>. If you can accomplish a greater than 80% control, you are successfully managing your chinch bug problem.

As with all pest problems, early detection and identification is essential to suppression of pests to a tolerable level.

Resources:

- Buss, E.A. (2007) *Southern Chinch Bug Management on St. Augustine grass*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

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