

## VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

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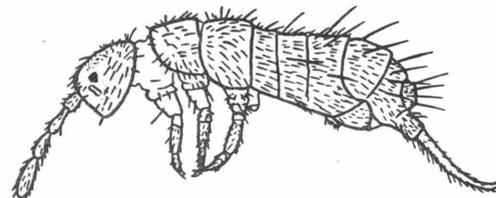
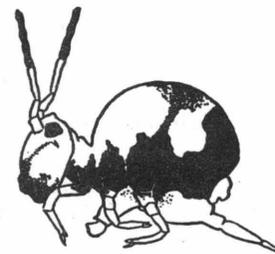
SPRINGTAILS

Springtails are very small (rarely more than 1/5 inch long), pale brown to cream colored insects that seem to hop and disappear when disturbed. The common name "springtail" has been applied to these insects because of this habit of springing away. A hook-like structure on the bottom side of the abdomen is snapped against the ground and this propels the insect. Springtails are commonly found in moist or damp places, usually in contact with soil. Homeowners encounter them in damp basements and on the surface of the soil of household plants.

Springtails have chewing mouthparts, but they rarely, if ever, damage houseplants (roots or leaves). The moist, organic soil of houseplants provides them the proper environment to live and increase in numbers. Plants that are overwatered during the fall and winter can support a large population of springtails in the potting soil. Frequently the plants begin to decline and homeowners blame the springtails. But not so! Springtails rarely cause the death of houseplants -- overwatering can, however.

Control. Controlling these tiny critters is not difficult -- here are the options:

- 1) Do nothing, but stop overwatering the plant!  
Let the soil dry out -- the springtails will leave or die.
- 2) Soak a few cigarettes in a cup of water for a few days -- then pour the water over the soil of the infested plants. The nicotine will kill the springtails.
- 3) Place a few moth balls on the surface of the soil.
- 4) Throw the plant out and start again. --Robinson

**INSECT NOTES**

Virginia Cooperative Extension Service programs, activities, and employment opportunities are available to all people regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, handicap, or political affiliation. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

An Educational Service of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Virginia State University, Virginia's Land-Grant Institutions, with U.S. Department of Agriculture and Local Governments Cooperating.

## SELECTING A PEST CONTROL OPERATOR

Following are some suggestions for selecting a professional pest control operator. If you have decided that the problem would be best handled by a professional, please consider these suggestions and comments.

DON'T PANIC. If you know or suspect an infestation of insects, there is no need to be alarmed. Insects work slowly and your house or food will not be ruined or collapse overnight. Consider termite or carpet beetle control as another repair job that may be necessary to keep your house in sound condition.

DON'T BE RUSHED. Take your time in selecting a pest control service. Delay of a few weeks or even months will make little difference. You always have ample time to purchase this service wisely and at your convenience.

INVESTIGATE BEFORE YOU INVEST. Buy pest control service with the same care that you would use in the purchase of any other service for your property. Be sure you are dealing with a reliable firm that has an established place of business.

The following are ways of investigating pest control services before investing:

1. If a firm offers references of work done in the past, take time to check such references carefully.
2. For a local firm, check that it is a responsible firm with an established place of business (through your Better Business Bureau or your Extension Agent).
3. For an out-of-town firm, make sure that it has an established place of business. Make your own check of the firm's references. Reliable firms welcome this.
4. Membership in the Virginia State Pest Control Association or membership in the National Pest Control Association is evidence that the firm has an established place of business and has met certain requirements.

KNOW THE CONTRACT. Ask your pest control operator to give you a written statement of the work he proposes to do and an estimate of the cost. He should give you time to consider his estimate.

It is customary to guarantee pest control work. Be sure you know what type of guarantee is offered by the firm. Determine if a yearly charge will be made during the guarantee period or whether these charges are included in the initial price of the job.

WORK ORDER. You will probably be asked to sign a work order when you decide on a service company. You should understand clearly what obligations you are assuming and what you are getting in return.

THREE-DAY COOLING-OFF PERIOD. In 1974 the Federal Trade Commission's Three-Day Cooling-Off Period for Door-to-Door Sales became effective. It covers all sales with a total value of \$25 or more in which the seller personally solicits the sale. This includes sales where the buyer initiates the contract as long as the sale takes place somewhere other than the place of business of the seller.

# INSECT SURVEY



The 1984 Annual Report from the Insect Identification Lab is now at the printer. Some of the highlights and points of interest are noted below:

- 1745 specimens were received, down slightly from last year (1815)
- Ornamental Plants and Shade Trees (666 requests, 218 different pests). The most frequently received were: aphids, spider mites, elm leaf beetle, greenstriped mapleworm, hickory tussock moth, orangestriped oakworm, boxwood mite, boxwood leafminer, and azalea lacebug.
- Household and Structural Wood (644 requests, 180 different pests). The most frequently received were: carpet beetles, carpenter ants, Indianmeal moth, elm leaf beetle, longhorned beetles, termites, earwigs, foreign grain beetle, larger yellow ant, smaller yellow ant.
- Vegetables and Field Crops (132 requests, 68 different pests). The most frequently received: aphids, fall armyworm, European corn borer, lady beetles, stalk borer.
- Fruits and Nuts (128 requests, 72 different pests). The most frequently received: aphids, blackberry psyllid, San Jose scale, stink bugs, strawberry rootworm.
- General (87 requests, 69 different pests). Most frequently received: Wheel bug, Halictid bees, Tiger swallowtail.
- Lawn and Turf (34 requests, 25 different pests). cicada killer, velvet ants
- Human (33 requests, 22 different pests). lone star tick, thrips
- Stored Products (14 requests, 13 different pests)
- Apiculture (4 requests, 3 different pests)
- Animal (3 requests, 3 different pests)

The report will be available by request only this year. If you're interested in obtaining a copy, drop me a line and I'll be happy to supply you with one. -- Dan Hilburn

## TERMITE CONTROL IN 1985

The chemical most commonly used for termite control -- chlordane -- will cost more in 1985. The chemical company that makes and supplies chlordane to the pest control industry announced a 25% increase in prices. It seems reasonable to assume that this price increase will be passed on to the consumer (=homeowner), but there may be a short lag period when professional pest control operators are using the chlordane they bought at a lower price. Extension Agents should be ready to remind homeowners of this price increase, and that there are alternatives to chlordane for termite control. A pest control operator may offer to use Aldrin, Dursban TC, or Termide ( a mixture of chlordane and heptachlor). Remember that there are no secret formulas or new chemicals. -- Robinson

## COLD WEATHER AND INSECTS

There is considerable curiosity as to what effects of the unusual cold weather will have upon insect survival. In the face of all the bad effects of the cold spell, people search for some good side effects. "Maybe the cold temperatures will kill a lot of the Japanese beetle grubs!" Well, I'll try to review the reasons why the Japanese beetle populations will not be severely affected by the unusual cold weather.

The Japanese beetle is a good example to work with. It is a pest of ornamentals, turf, fruit trees, home gardens, field crops. How will the unusual cold spell affect this common pest? A brief review of the life cycle is necessary. The adults emerge in late spring, mate, and lay eggs in the turf. The grubs live in the soil just below the surface; they feed on tender grass roots. In the fall the grubs migrate deeper in the soil to spend the winter. They return to the grass-root zone in the spring.

Most areas experienced day or night temperatures near zero or below ( $-15^{\circ}$  F in Blacksburg one night!). But these are records of air temperatures, not the temperature of the soil where the grub is spending the winter. The soil temperature during this time probably remained near  $32^{\circ}$  F! The soil temperature is greatly affected by the presence or absence of snow cover. Snow serves as an efficient insulator in holding the temperature of the soil to within a few degrees of the freezing point of water. And so long as a covering of snow is present, even when only an inch or two thick, it acts to keep the soil temperature well above the point at which it would have a lethal effect on the soil insects.

