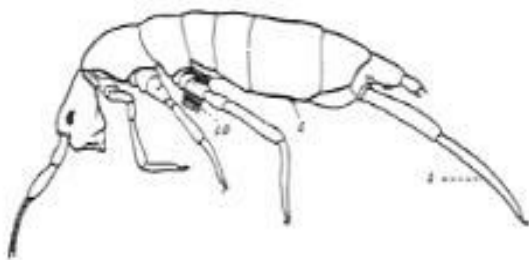




## Springtails

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Generalized body shape of many common springtails.



A sminthurid collembolan (Ernest C. Bernard, Univ. of Tennessee, Bugwood.org)

**Description** Springtails, also known as collembola (Order: Collembola), are very small arthropods rarely more than 0.2 inch (5 mm) long. They are often pale brown, gray, or cream colored. Some have a patterned or mottled appearance while others are bristly with many hairs. Many springtails have elongated bodies but others are globular or dumpy in shape. They usually jump away and seem to disappear when disturbed. They have no wings and cannot fly.

**Damage** Springtails are only a nuisance in the home and are harmless to humans and animals. Some may damage the young leaves or roots of plants in gardens when populations are very high. They are mostly a concern in greenhouses and mushroom cellars. One species known as the lucerne flea (*Sminthurus viridis* L.) is an agriculture pest of alfalfa and grain crops in Australia. Homeowners who overwater their houseplants may blame springtails for the decline and death of a houseplant, but in reality the plant probably died from excessive watering.

**Habitat** Springtails are generally found in places with moist soil and high levels of humidity, which they need to survive. They may be found in damp basements and bathrooms, or on the soil surface of potted houseplants. They have chewing mouthparts and generally graze on organic matter such as decaying vegetation, leaf litter, and mold.

**Control** Springtails cannot live without sufficient moisture. Reduce humidity levels in basements and bathrooms to discourage establishment. Clean grout to remove mold and mildew, which springtails eat. Stop overwatering houseplants so that the soil dries out and the springtails either leave or die.

**Life cycle** Springtails have an incomplete life cycle of egg, immature, and adult stages. Immature springtails look like adults, only much smaller. Outdoor populations are often high, up to 100,000 per cubic meter of surface soil or many millions per acre.

**Interesting Facts** Springtails have a forked appendage at the tip of their abdomens that they can release to catapult themselves through the air, which is how they get their common name.