

Springtails or Snow Fleas

Springtails are one of the most numerous arthropods on the earth's surface. They occasionally become a nuisance pest. This is especially true when they build up their numbers during wet spring conditions. When the spring rains stop and the hot summer begins, they migrate indoors looking for a cool, moist environment. Springtails are not a health concern, but people often become anxious over their presence. Springtails are harmless to humans and larger animals; they cannot bite.

What do they look like?

Springtails are only a few millimeters in length, or smaller. Their color varies, but can range from a dirt gray to a purple-like tone. They lack wings and have a unique fork-like structure on their underside used for self-propulsion called the "furcula". When attempting to touch a springtail they will "spring" away, appearing to have disappeared.

Life History

Female springtails may lay up to 400 eggs during their lifetime. Populations grow quickly in cool, wet/moist spring conditions and decrease during hot, dry summer conditions. Springtails consume decaying organic matter, algae, fungi and bacteria.

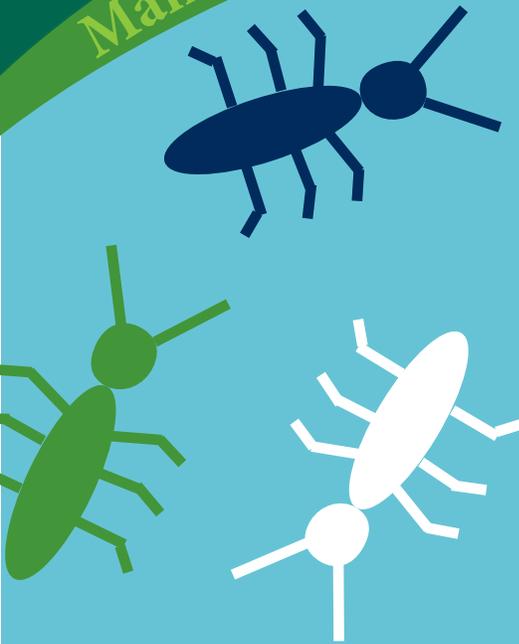
Springtails Indoors

Indoors, springtails prefer dark, damp areas. They can temporarily be a nuisance, but their migrations are short-lived. Springtails found indoors will eventually die.



Did You Know?

- Springtails are one of the most primitive arthropods known.
- Springtails can jump up to 100 times their body length.
- Springtails occur in moist habitats almost everywhere except under water.
- Snow fleas are able to live in the winter, and in the Arctic and Antarctic, by having an "antifreeze" that prevents them from freezing.



Above:

Figure 1. Springtails, with tail-like furcula visible. The furcula is typically held under the body.

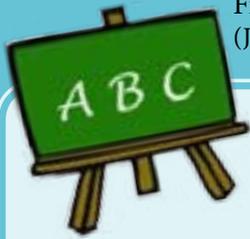
Right:

Figure 2. Springtail size relative to a U.S. penny.





Above:
Figure 3. Springtail on debris
(Joseph Berger, Bugwood.org.).

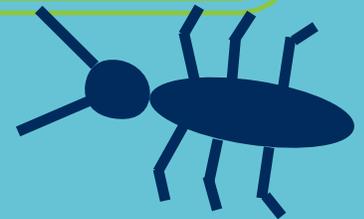


Managing Springtails With Integrated Pest Management

- **Inspect and monitor:**
 - Areas that are conducive springtail habitat, such as moist areas with plenty of organic material and near water sources such as sinks, bathrooms, boilers and potted plants.
- **Habitat modification:**
 - Eliminate “moist” areas and leaks, especially in bathrooms, kitchens and storage closets.
 - Provide an alternative moisture point, distant from the building to divert the migration.
 - Remove debris and organic material that can harbor springtails.
 - Potted plants can be left to dry out between waterings to discourage springtail growth.
 - Reduce clutter and clean under sinks and around areas with a water source.
 - Thoroughly clean the baseboards, cracks and crevices around problem areas.
- **Exclusion:**
 - Keep windows closed and use weather stripping to seal windows.
 - Seal cracks, crevices and areas around plumbing in problem areas on the building interior and exterior, with an appropriate sealant or caulk.
- **Physical:**
 - Vacuum large aggregations of springtails and discard the bag; repeat until gone.
- **Chemical:**
 - Springtails are resistant to many pesticides.
 - Chemical control of springtails is not recommended.

Springtails are extremely susceptible to desiccation (drying) and therefore need areas of high moisture like soil, decomposing material, or in indoor areas that have plumbing leaks or moisture issues. Springtails are strictly an occasional nuisance pest, and usually dissipate quickly.

Springtails are sometimes found in the soil of potted plants. They are often seen after watering, when they move from the saturated soil to the surface. In houseplant soils the springtails are performing their normal functions, feeding on decaying organic matter. Allowing the soil to completely dry out between waterings will decrease their populations.



For more info. check out:

Utah State Univ.: Springtails
<http://utahpests.usu.edu/files/uploads/UtahPests-Newsletter-summer12-2.pdf>

Colorado State Univ.:Springtails
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/insect/05602.html>

Univ. of Minnesota: Springtails
<http://www.vegedge.umn.edu/vegpest/beneficials/Springtails.htm>

