

Springtails

General Information:

Springtails are one of the most abundant soil-dwelling arthropods in the world. Because they are so numerous, they occasionally become nuisance pests. 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 can migrate indoors looking for a cool, moist environment. Springtails consume decaying organic matter, algae, fungi, and bacteria. Springtails are not a health concern, but people often become anxious over their presence. Some springtails are also known as “snow fleas.”

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 it will magically “spring” away, appearing to have disappeared.

Life Cycle

Female springtails may lay up to 400 eggs during their lifetime. Juveniles molt five to eight times before reaching adulthood. Populations grow quickly in cool, wet/moist spring conditions and decrease during hot, dry summer conditions.

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 harmless to humans and larger animals; they cannot bite.
- Springtails are decomposers and feed primarily on decaying organic matter.
- During hot, arid periods, springtails can migrate from outdoor areas into damp areas inside buildings.
- Springtails are resistant to most insecticides. Exclusion, plumbing maintenance, and vacuuming are primary control techniques.
- One diagnostic for springtails is when you attempt to touch/catch them, they spring/jump away, as if magically disappearing.



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).

The name "springtail" comes from its response when threatened. Springtails release their "furcula" from under the body and it strikes the ground, flinging them away from danger.

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.

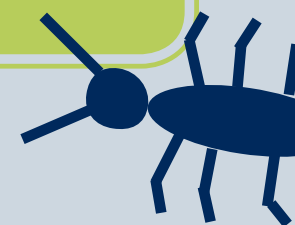
Some people view springtails as being dangerous or parasitic, however they pose no threat to people, pets or structures. Springtails are strictly an occasional nuisance pest, and usually dissipate quickly.

Springtails are sometimes found in the soil of potted plants. They are often recognized 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 between waterings will negatively affect their populations, as well as negatively affect fungus gnats, if present.



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 help seal windows.
 - Seal cracks, crevices, and areas around plumbing in springtail 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.



For more info, check out:

Utah State Univ.: Springtails
<http://utahpests.usu.edu/hum/utah-pests-news/up-summer12-newsletter/springtail-into-summer/>

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>

