Southern Chinch Bugs and Your Turf Grass
Blissu insularis Barber, Lygaeidae, HEMIPTERA

Chinch bugs are one of the most damaging insects affecting lawns today. They are highly resistant to chemicals and can infest an area in a very short period of time. Chinch bugs kill your lawn by feeding on plant fluids in the thatch, within the leaf sheaths, robbing the plant of moisture, which kills the grass plants and in turn adds to weed invasion.

The southern chinch bug loves to feed on St. Augustine grass, but also consumes Centipede Pangola, Torpedo, and occasionally Bermuda grass. In southern Florida they are active all year. The affected area starts out as yellowish patches in the grass, and as the insects develop and eat they spread to the outer edges of the area and the patches get larger and larger. They are very active during the hottest driest summer months.

These pests have developed high resistance to every class of chemical used against them. Proper insect identification is the first step in treating the problem. Chinch bugs are red in the nymph stage, with a white stripe on their back. Adults have black bodies with shiny white wings and range in size from 1/8 to 1/10 of an inch long.

Southern Chinch bugs have seven to ten generations per year, as the south Florida climate is perfect in which for them to thrive. Each generation lives up to two months, and all stages of life are in attendance all year. Since they move around slowly, and usually walk instead of fly, there is less hereditary diversity within populations which results in resistant strains.

Plan of action:
Different chemical class rotation of insecticides is currently being used as a line of defense; however, the list of insecticides that actually kill chinch bugs here in Florida is short. The problem is that if the resistance genes are retained in the Chinch bugs, resistance could appear with a few short years. Other options are in progress, possibly designed to inhibit their development, and will hopefully be on the market soon.

The information for this article was provided by the University of Florida IFAS Extension office and Stormy Holloway, Sterling Management Services

STERLING
MANAGEMENT SERVICES