

**If your lawn is suddenly turning brown, despite consistent watering, it could be a sudden infestation of**  
*Chinch Bugs*



In our neighborhood, like most in Florida, one of the most destructive pests in Floratam and other St. Augustine lawns is the tiny chinch bug. If not recognized early, chinch bug damage can lead to costly lawn replacement for the homeowner.

**Description:** The **chinch bug adult** is 3/16 inch long with black body and folded white wings over its back. The **immature nymph** is orange to brick red, with a white band across its back.

**Life Cycle:** Adults over-winter in thatch and become active when air temperatures are consistently in the 70's°. Eggs usually hatch out in May and the nymphs mature in 4 to 6 weeks. Two or three generations of bugs occur during the year.

**Damage:** Damage is most severe in hot, dry summers in sunny locations. The insect sucks plant juices while releasing a toxin that kills the grass. This results in spreading patches of brown, dead grass. Discolored areas exposed to sunlight may be "hot spots" for chinch bug damage. Most homeowners will first notice dead patches of grass along a driveway, curb, sidewalk or foundation of the home, due to the heat emitted from such objects.

**Diagnosis:** These bugs are tiny and often hidden deep in the grass. To determine if you have them, (and believe me, we all do) begin inspecting a greener area adjacent to a brown damaged spot in the lawn. Flood the area with a hose, and all kinds of creatures, good and bad will emerge. One of the last to rear its ugly head is the chinch bug. You can also determine infestations by using a large coffee can with both ends removed. Press one end of the can about 2 or 3 inches into the soil, fill with soapy water, and watch for about 5 minutes. If chinch bugs are present, they will float to the surface. (This test will also bring mole crickets to the surface). Check areas where the yellowish spots and the green grass meet in several different locations.

**Treatment:** There are many products you can purchase at Wal-mart, Lowe's and the like to treat chinch bugs. I find the granular works best and can be spread with either a walk-behind or hand spreader. Avoid the fine powder type because it ends up blowing back in your face with the slightest breeze. Water it in and be sure to repeat the application in about two weeks to kill those insects that did not yet emerge.

**Prevention:** Thatch removal is important for eliminating conditions favorable for chinch bug survival. Maintaining adequate moisture will increase the tolerance of turf to feeding damage and will promote beneficial fungi that attack chinch bugs. Low nitrogen fertilization slows chinch bug reproduction although the lawns regularly attacked by these insects (St. Augustine) are heavy feeders and prefer more fertilizer than other turf grasses.

Consult the **Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension Office** (5339 County Road 579, Seffner, FL; Phone: 744-5519; Hours 8-5 M-F) about feeding your St. Augustine grass or any other lawn and yard related problems.

Remember, Keep a watchful eye on your yard this summer!