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SUMMARY

Abundant in nature, springtails are harmless to people and pets. They can occasionally be an annoyance, but controls are almost never needed. Indoors, simply eliminate the conditions they prefer and they will disappear.

Springtails, Outside or Inside

by Emma Connery, UC Master Gardener Program Coordinator

Outside or inside, springtails are an annoyance but harmless and not difficult to manage.

Q: Can you identify these bugs? They are all over my newspaper when I pick it up in the morning. As you can see they are very small and they sort of jump. I don't bring the paper into my house for fear of infesting it. I have called the newspaper and complained?

A: The insect you brought in for identification is a springtail. Springtails belong to the insect order Collémbola. The common name "springtail" is derived from the forked structure located near the tail that acts like a spring mechanism and propels these minute insects through the air. Springtails, while very common and very abundant, are seldom observed due to their small size and habit of living in concealed places.

Springtail Habitat:

Most species live in moist shady environments in soil or in such habitats as leaf litter, under bark, in decaying logs, mushroom beds, or on vegetation.

They can be found in great abundance under boards or logs where they find both moisture and darkness. They feed on algae, fungi, and decaying vegetable matter – not people – so you don't need to worry about them biting you or your pet, and they do not transmit any diseases.

In Search of Moisture:

Springtails are wingless and if their environment becomes dry they will crawl in search of moisture. For this reason they can be found moving about on the sides and surface of swimming pools and can be one of the most troublesome swimming pool pests. I cannot exactly explain why they are all over your newspaper but I doubt it was delivered infested. Most likely they crawled out from your landscaped area during the wee hours and sought shade and moisture from the paper. In your situation no management tactics are necessary other than simply brushing them off the newspaper.



“The best [indoor] management tactic is to eliminate the humidity (moisture) and the food source and the springtails will disappear.”

Home Invasion an Annoyance:

Ever in search of moisture, they can also invade homes. After entering a house they crawl about and are most commonly found in the kitchen and bathroom trapped in sinks and bathtubs. Small numbers need only be wiped up. If populations build up in the home it is because there is high humidity and a ready food source (dust, lint, food particles, etc.). They can continue to populate, but only if the environment is right

and there is a ready food source.

Therefore, the best management tactic is to eliminate the humidity (moisture) and the food source and the springtails will disappear.

For More Information:

The University of California has a free publication on the management of springtails which is available at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74136.html>



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