



Question of the Week

Q. There's a large mass of very small insects on my lawn that jump when disturbed. What are these insects and are they dangerous?

A. It sounds like a swarm of Collembola, an ancient order of organisms commonly known as springtails. Among the most abundant of soil-dwelling arthropods, springtails live in a variety of habitats, feeding on decaying vegetation and soil fungi. They come in a variety of colors. Most species are less than 2/10-inch long. Their common name comes from their ability to catapult considerable distances when they engage a spring-loaded forked tail called a "furcula." Because they dry out unless they remain in a moist environment, springtails may become abundant on the ground during long rainy spells in the spring or fall.

Springtails aren't harmful to humans, pets, plants or structures, so we generally don't recommend chemical control. Swarms are short-lived, lasting no more than a few days. You can prevent swarming around foundations and doorways by eliminating excess moisture and keeping ground-level entrance areas free of rotting leaves and other organic debris.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m. 2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu