



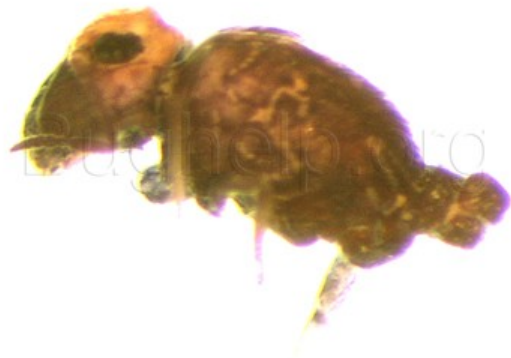
Springtails

Springtails, also known to science as Collembola, are tiny, simple, and extremely numerous relatives of insects. They live in moist environments, especially in their natural habitat of woodland leaf litter, decaying plant materials, and the soil surface. Some live in grasslands or the canopies of forests, but still they survive only in moist places. Springtails are good for the environment because they support the decay and recycling of materials and nutrients in natural areas. However springtails can appear in the human environment and may become numerous enough to be indoor pests.



Appearance

These tiny arthropods rarely grow larger than 6 millimeters, which is less than half an inch, and more commonly they are much smaller. What captures the attention is the appearance of large numbers of springtails either in the home or in unexpected places, such as around and in a swimming pool. As the name suggests, springtails have a springy “tail” called a furcula, which acts like a spring-loaded trigger. The flicking of this tail can flip and propel a springtail 3 or 4 inches. In large numbers this can appear as a swarm on the ground, and be especially alarming inside the home. Springtails appear in a wide variety of colors, but most common species are white, gray or brownish.



What makes them pests?

Springtails are commonly found indoors where there are moisture problems. For example a bathroom floor that allows moisture to the wood below the floor covering is a likely breeding spot. Window frames that retain moisture or have begun to rot are good habitat as well. Basements that remain wet, areas that collect water from leaking pipes or refrigeration drains, moisture damaged sheetrock or paneled walls, and stairwells that collect leaves and rain water are other sources of springtails. The perimeter of the building may collect organic debris that will support springtail growth and there may be a trigger, such as heavy rain or hot dry conditions that drives them inside.



What should I do about them?

Inevitably, if there is a persistent problem with springtails indoors, there is a moisture problem that needs to be solved. Correcting moisture issues by fixing leaks, preventing water entry and wood decay in window and door frames, in floors, and reducing humidity in the basement are all long-term solutions. Clean up organic matter like leaves, sticks, cardboard, and wood both indoors and around the perimeter of the home to eliminate habitat. Desiccant (drying) powder insecticides, such as diatomaceous earth can speed the elimination of spring-



tails but will not work unless moisture is reduced. Aerosol insecticides can also help kill the ones that are visible, but again, the long term solution is moisture control. When choosing an insecticide read the label to be sure springtails are listed as a target.