

Insidious Insects

Experts fearlessly forecast which insects
will be on the Most Wanted list

By Frank H. Andorka Jr.
Associate Editor

When I reach Dave Shetlar, professor of entomology at The Ohio State University, he's in Florida on spring break doing what he loves most — chasing bugs.

"I'll have to call you back," he says. "I'm about to capture a good sample of mole crickets."

When he finally does take a break from digging for insects and returns the call, he says he's reluctant to forecast which insects will bug superintendents this year. But Shetlar knows superintendents would rather be proactive than reactive, so he and other experts agree to predict which creepy crawlers might cause the most headaches for superintendents this year:

White grubs — Superintendents in areas with a wetter-than-normal spring should watch for white grub activity, says Shetlar, who expects levels for white grubs to be up slightly.

Ron Ross, superintendent of Quarry Oaks GC in Ashland, Neb., believes Shetlar's prediction and says his course is suffering from grubs. An extreme drought last year combined with a mild, short winter to make it difficult for him to control them.

"Our mild winter didn't kill many of the first stage grubs, and the weather forced us to put on our insecticide treatment

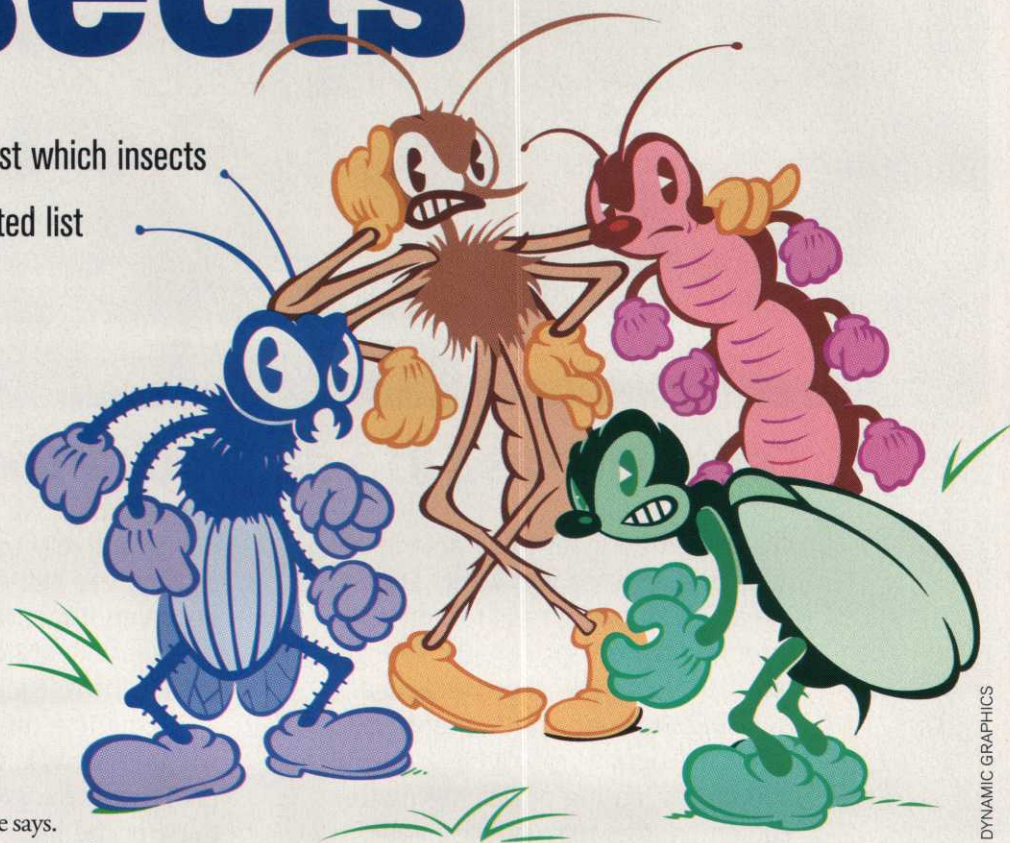
later than we wanted," Ross says. "Everything worked against us this spring, and we're paying the price now."

Fire ants — Pat Gross, agronomist for the USGA's Green Section in Santa Ana, Calif., says fire ants are a perennial problem his office monitors. He advises superintendents to watch their sprinkler systems closely for the telltale mounds because fire ants like to build colonies near electrical currents.

"Superintendents need to control fire ants as a matter of golfer and maintenance crew safety," Gross says. "They can be a problem, but if you notice them early enough, they're not a 911 emergency."

"Fire ants are a perennial problem in the South and in the West," Shetlar says. "You have to be on the lookout for the little mounds they create around trees because they will attack unsuspecting golfers. They are nasty."

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DYNAMIC GRAPHICS

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Shetlar says superintendents can treat for fire ants effectively with fipronil, the same chemical that eradicates mole crickets. He adds that there's anecdotal evidence that Merit can suppress fire ant populations, but it can take between six to eight weeks to work.

Canker worms – These caterpillars, commonly known as inchworms, can defoliate trees with frightening speed, Shetlar says. Repeated infestations can also weaken a tree's resistance to disease, he says.

"The anecdotal evidence suggests that the Midwest could be in for a larger infestation of this pest," Shetlar says. "They come in cycles of two to three years, and they're cycling back this year."

Shetlar says superintendents can control these insects with pyrethroids.

Redgum lerp psyllid – The Redgum lerp psyllid defoliates eucalyptus trees by sucking the sap from the leaves. The leaves fall off, depriving the trees of nourishment and weakening their immune systems, Gross says.

"We saw a lot of damage last year, and we're afraid it might be back again full throttle," Gross says. "Several courses aren't taking any chances. They've already sprayed their trees with Imid insecticide, which has worked."

Gross says he has also heard of success with a microinjected product called Imicide from J.J. Mauget Co. in Arcadia, Calif. The pesticide is injected into the base of the tree and is carried through its vascular system to the leaves. When the Redgum lerp psyllid eats the leaves, it ingests the pesticide.

Viburnum leaf beetle – The invasion of this European insect will wreak havoc on viburnum, Shetlar says.

"We've been telling superintendents to plant these shrubs because they're low maintenance," Shetlar says. "But if this bug continues to spread, [the shrubs are] not going to be easy maintenance anymore."

The larvae hatch in May, Shetlar says. Entomologists across the country are watching the bug's migration, which has already spread through New York, he says. "We'll tell you in the fall how bad it was," he says.

Black turfgrass atenius – Pam Smith, superintendent at Blackberry Patch GC in Coldwater, Mich., says she's bracing for the annual invasion of these root-eating bugs. The insects attack cool-season grasses during high-stress periods, so Smith says she's prepared to do battle this month with the adults.

"I knock down the adult beetles with a synthetic pyrethroid to reduce the adult population," Smith says. "Then I hit them

WANTED DEAD

FIRE ANT



Fire ants stream out of their mounds and up the legs of unsuspecting golfers and crew members with lightning speed. Then they all seem to attack at once, as if someone has blown a whistle to begin.

REDGUM LERP PSYLLID



This sap-sucking insect has nefarious plans to destroy more eucalyptus trees than ever before. The Redgum Lerp Psyllid is the worst Australian import since Paul Hogan.

with Merit late in the month to kill the remaining larvae. You know you've been successful when you start seeing the carcasses when you cut cups."

Smith says black turfgrass ateni

us is frequently hard to diagnose because the symptoms look like localized dry spot. Gross says the insect isn't only a problem in the Midwest.

"Courses in [the California] area lost a lot of turf last year to that pest," Gross says. "We're monitoring the problem closely this year."

Sodworms, cutworms, billbugs and armyworms – "If you've got dryer than normal conditions, these are the bugs that you're going to see," Shetlar says. "Any insects in the caterpillar family will destroy the crowns of your turf."

The newer chemistries, particularly the neonicotinols, may control more pests than scientists originally thought, Shetlar says.

"Some of these newer chemicals could be called mood-altering drugs for bugs," Shetlar says. "We're going to have to rethink how we use some of them because they're showing great promise on other pests."

With that, Shetlar says he must go because his grandson was calling him outside. It was time to catch some more bugs. ■