

# Southern pests moving north?

VALLEY FORGE, Pa. — Some pests traditionally considered a problem only in the South may become headaches for northern landscape managers too, says Dr. Pat Cobb, an Auburn University entomologist.

Spittlebugs, fire ants, mole crickets and green June beetles may pose a future threat to cool-season turf, says Cobb—but not right away.

"Some insect pests are on the move, and why this is we're not sure. One factor is that we lost the residual insecticides out of the soil," Cobb told landscapers at the Eastern Pennsylvania Turfgrass Association's annual meeting. "Another reason is that all across the United States, especially in the South, we're growing better grass, and insect pests are attracted to the greenest, most lush turf."



Dr. Pat Cobb

Mole crickets, the most damaging southern insect, are beginning to make an impact in the north. Entomologists in southern Illinois and New Jersey have reported identifying more northern mole crickets in the past two years than all years previous, Cobb says.

They're difficult to control because they can go as deep as eight feet, move

quickly (perhaps several feet a night) and they fly twice a year.

"I don't know whether you'll have a mole cricket problem or not," says Cobb, "but there's no question that mole crickets are on the move. And when you have them you'll know it."

The green June beetle is "easy to kill but difficult to control" because the beetle flies for a longer period of time, extending the period it lays eggs. The lowest insecticide rates will wipe out the grubs, adds Cobb.

The two-line spittlebug used to be found only along the coast from Maine to Florida, says Cobb, but it too has begun moving inland. It has been found in the northern part of states bordering the Gulf of Mexico and Oklahoma. It is most dangerous in its immature stage and needs a lot of moisture to survive.

"I can't say what the extent of the problem will be," says Cobb, "but the insect is distributed in the eastern part of the country. So the potential is there for it to spread, as we've seen it spread in the South."

The best way to control the spittlebug is to de-thatch, thereby disrupting the environment for its development, adds Cobb.

Fire ants have been reported in southern Tennessee. In the South, "they're a problem, but not something we haven't learned to manage," she says.

"Fire ants survive real well in interiorscapes. They survive well in greenhouses and other protected container stock. So that's why it's important for you to be aware that we have had some reports from this area of fire ants brought in by nursery stock," says Cobb. □



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