



## It's a cinch, it was a Chinch!

This seemed to be the year of the chinch bug. If you live close to a field of hay or wheat, you probably had an invasion of chinch bugs in July and August.

These small (less than a quarter of an inch) bugs tend to feed voraciously on grasses of various kinds. They suck the juices out of stems of the plants and become serious pests to agricultural crops. The immatures, called "nymphs" are reddish in color and cannot fly. So they remain in the fields until they are full grown and, as the field grasses mature and dry (or they are harvested by the farmers), the adults seek new feeding grounds and migrate "en masse" to other areas. This is when they invade our houses and yards in large numbers. The adults are black with a whitish spot on either side of the body, sort of in the middle of the critter. These features are best seen with a dissecting scope or hand lens. The minute plant bug, a beneficial, is similar in color, but is much smaller (about 1/8 inch). They are never found in large quantities, as are the chinch bugs.

The life cycle of the chinch bug is much the same as most true bugs. Eggs, laid in spring, hatch into nymphs which resemble the adults in shape, but do not have wings. The nymphs use their "beaks" to feed during the summer shedding their outside skeletons periodically, and finally mature and develop wings. This is when we get lots of calls from clients, as they "sort-of" swarm at this stage and really worry people that something is eating their house or yard!

One answer to the chinch bug problem is to just let them be or vacuum them up until the invasion is over. Another is to use an "approved" spray that can be used in the home or garden. Using sprays is always a last resort, as most insecticides are indiscriminate and will kill beneficials as well as nuisance insects. The ultimate solution is to move away to an area that has no agricultural fields around! But, who wants to do that? We love it where we are!!!

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