

UGH! LOVE BUGS!® by Dan Pemble, Kissimmee, Florida



At certain times of the year here in Central Florida, we can expect to be completely inundated by 100's & thousands of unwelcome love bugs! Much to our dislike, they will be swarming everywhere outside as they go through their repetitive yearly mating rituals. Typically their eggs/larvae, as put in place during their last mating period, remain unnoticed in our grassy areas while it feeds on decaying vegetation (thatch) and continues to grow. Then, during late spring (April and May) and late summer (August & September), the conditions are ideal for males to emerge from their pupae and take to the skies; very shortly thereafter, the females emerge and a "mating frenzy" begins! Actually, in south Florida, a 3rd "season" can occur in December. All 3 seasons may last 4-5 weeks each. The males and females remain coupled for several days, even while they fly (albeit in an erratic manner), such that the fertilization process can be completed; then they separate and each female lays 100-350 eggs, again in grassy areas. The average life of both the adult female and male is only 3-4 days.

There is a myth that the University of Florida created love bugs to combat the mosquito population; this is untrue because love bugs actually migrated here from South and Central America.

Although love bugs do not bite, sting or otherwise harm humans, nor do they cause any damage to our crops and plants, they are indeed considered to be a nuisance! Because their body chemistry is slightly acidic, when they are smashed onto automobile paint surfaces and their remains are not removed in a timely manner, some etching or pitting of the paint may occur. Also, hundreds of these insects smashed onto a car's windshield may occlude vision and they can also block a car's cooling system.

Very few insects or other creatures feed on love bugs because of their acidity; and, since there are currently no human-implemented controls to eradicate or reduce the population of love bugs, it is left to nature itself to deal with. Such natural control can include the presence of certain fungus strains in the grassy thatch where eggs are laid or the presence of extremely dry climatic conditions; of course love bugs are not necessarily immune from chemical insecticides applied to lawns.

It appears to be a fact of life for those of us living in Florida that each year we will continue to see love bug invasions and we will simply have to accept it! However, following is a man-made breed of love bugs ("Herbie – The Love Bug") that has brought laughter and good feelings to many!

