

## Chinch Bugs in The Woodlands Lawns By Bob Dailey, Master Gardener

Seeing a halo of yellow, dying St. Augustine? It might not be a result of the drought. It could be chinch bugs. Over watering a lawn will not eradicate chinch bugs. It will only make your lawn more susceptible to them. Over watering will also kill off beneficial microbes in the soil.



### Investigating the Crime Scene

Even if you've got yellowing patches, you may or may not have chinch bugs. The symptoms could be a result of a variety of ailments. Try these investigative techniques to find out whether chinch bugs are the culprits:

1. Slowly slide your feet through the grass. Watch for the bugs to crawl across your shoe. Adult chinch bugs are about 1/5 of an inch long, have shiny brown or black bodies, and some have white wings folded back over the bodies.
2. Or you can use a gallon can with both ends removed. Pick an area where the yellowing grass meets green grass. This is likely where the infection will be. Insert one end of the can about two to three inches into the ground. Fill the can with soapy water and keep an eye on the container for about five minutes. If there are chinch bugs, they will float to the surface. If the water infiltrates out of the can, refill it slowly, and wait. Repeat this process several times in different areas of suspected infestation.

### Controlling Chinch Bugs

- Don't concern yourself about using pesticides. Man-made pesticides are bad for the environment and they won't do any good anyway. Chinch bugs have developed immunity to almost every pesticide thrown at them.
- Don't overwater. Over watering forces needed oxygen away from the grass roots, and weakens the root structure. Most people think that if an inch a

week on the lawn is good, two inches or more are better. This is simply not true.

- Remove thatch. Thatch provides conditions favorable for chinch bugs. There are mower attachments as well as professional services available.
- Mulch your grass with a mulching mower. The clipped grass does not become thatch; rather the nitrogen-rich mulched pieces decompose rapidly, adding nutrients back into the soil.
- Use an organic, low nitrogen fertilizer. This will help slow chinch bug reproduction.

This photo shows lawn damage from chinch bugs. Overwatering is evident from the runoff collecting in the street gutter.



A common indicator of chinch bug infestation begins at the curb line.



Chinch bugs also give the appearance that the lawn needs additional water. This is not correct. Once the lawn is infested, applying additional water will not revive the damaged area

