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Irritating Rhodegrass Mealybug Lurking in Turfgrass

A growing turfgrass pest is the Rhodesgrass mealybug, *Antonina graminis*. There are more than 60 grass hosts for this mealybug, but it mainly prefers Rhodesgrass, Johnsongrass, Bermudagrass, and St. Augustine grass. The Rhodegrass mealybug originated from Asia, but is now found in the southern states from Florida to California.

The mealybug's body is dark, purplish-brown in color, oval in shape and between 3 by 1.5 mm in length. The body is covered with white waxy secretions that tend to turn yellow with age. There are no males, so the females are parthenogenetic and reproduce ovoviviparously (give live birth). The first instar crawler is cream colored and actively walks along the blade. However, the second and third instars are legless and saclike. Their bodies also become covered with wax, so they look like the adults only smaller.

These insects are often noticed as white waxy masses accumulate at the base of stems or under leaf blades. This mealybug feeds on plant sap, which interferes with water and nutrient uptake within the vascular system of the plant. Their feeding causes the grass blades to become discolored and wilt. However if an infestation exists, then stunting and death may occur. Also, sooty mold can develop since these mealybugs excrete honeydew. The damage to turfgrass is usually greater in sunny areas, where it is hot and dry.

Some Control Options:

Always collect and destroy clippings of infested grass. For chemical control, chemicals such as bifenthrin, cyfluthrin or imidacloprid can be used to control this mealybug. Thorough coverage is needed and a surfactant is often helpful. There are really no defined thresholds before chemical treatment should begin, so treatment should be based on such things as population size, damage, time of year, and type of grass.



Photo of Rhodesgrass mealybugs. Photo by North Carolina Cooperative Extension, <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/O&T/lawn/note127/note127.html>.

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