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Rhodesgrass Mealybug Infesting Turfgrass

Rhodesgrass mealybugs are not a new insect pest in Texas, since they were first discovered in the 1940s. This mealybug is native to Asia and seems to be found more frequently in the Gulf States. It has a wide range of host grasses, with Bermuda grass and St. Augustine grass being the most susceptible but tall fescue and centipede grass can also become infested.

Only females are known of the Rhodesgrass mealybug so they reproduce through parthenogenesis (without males). The female will deposit between 300 to 600 eggs in a white, cottony ovisac that is spherical in shape. The eggs will hatch in 1 to 3 weeks and the crawlers will begin feeding under the leaf sheath at a node. Crawlers can be introduced into new areas by wind or attaching to animals as they cross the infested grass.

The Rhodesgrass mealybugs will be noticed by the presence of waxy, white masses at the base of the stems and leaf sheaths. These mealybugs feed under leaf sheaths, on nodes or in the crowns. They remove the plant sap with their piercing-sucking mouthparts. This disrupts the normal water and nutrient uptake, so the grass will turn brown and wilt. However, mealybug infestations can lead to stunting and death of the turfgrass. Damage may be most noticeable during periods of drought or if the grass is stressed.

Some Control Options:

Non-Chemical Controls:

Healthy turfgrass will have lower mealybug populations, so proper fertilization and watering is needed.

Keep beneficial insects in the area to reduce the number of mealybugs, such as big-eyed bugs and lady beetles.

After mowing, collect and destroy all infested grass clippings.

Chemical Control:

If an infestation exists then chemicals can be used such as bifenthrin, deltamethrin, acephate or imidacloprid. Treatments should be based on level of infestation, amount of damage, time of year and weather conditions.



Rhodesgrass Mealybugs. Photo by Eileen A. Buss, Assistant Professor, Entomology and Nematology Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville.

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