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## SPRINGTAILS (Order Collembola)

Springtails are tiny hexapods (six-legged arthropods) closely related to modern insects. While they are primarily soil-dwellers, they can be a nuisance in damp areas of a home such as basements, bathrooms, cellars, and kitchens.

### **Description:**

Springtails are minute animals, 1/16<sup>th</sup> to 1/8<sup>th</sup> inch long. They often show up in high numbers, appearing like grains or piles of soot. Their shape and coloration are variable, but all of them have a spine-like mechanism underneath the abdomen known as a furcula. This appendage gives them their name. When disturbed, springtails will extend their furcula to propel or 'spring' themselves into the air. The immatures and adults appear identical except for size.

Springtails can be found worldwide. There are around 8,200 named species. They live in all types of soil and feed on algae, fungi, plant roots, and decaying organic matter. They are an essential part of a healthy natural ecosystem and the nutrient recycling process. They are most abundant in damp and humid soils. Although they are a nuisance when found indoors, they will not cause any structural damage. Springtails do not bite or sting, nor are they associated with causing contact dermatitis in humans.



**Fig. 1: Springtails**

During wet weather, especially in late winter and spring, springtails may temporarily flee areas that are suddenly flooded by heavy rain or thawing snow. During these times, they may temporarily invade structures by crawling up foundations, entering via windows, screens, and doorways. As they are small, they can easily pass through screens and small cracks. They may also appear in clusters or patches on pavement or concrete or climb up fencing. They can form 'rafts' floating on standing water such as ponds, birdbaths, or swimming pools. They are also occasionally encountered moving or jumping on top of snow, earning them the nickname 'snow fleas.'

Fortunately, wet event invasions of springtails are temporary, and the activity will naturally decline as their natural habitat dries out. In household situations where springtail activity is present year-round, it is because of persistent damp conditions. These can be the result of water leaks, damp basements, the soil of overwatered houseplants, and winter ice dams on buildings causing water issues.

**Prevention and Control:**

Insecticides labeled for springtails may provide temporary management, but unless the root cause of a water issue is addressed the springtails will return. Effective springtail control involves eliminating high moisture conditions. Repair plumbing leaks and resolve other water leaks and damage. Run fans and dehumidifiers indoors to increase air circulation and decrease humidity, especially in damp basements. Avoid overwatering houseplants; allow soil to dry completely between waterings. Remove excessive mulch and wet ground cover around the foundation of homes and buildings. Home barrier-type outdoor pesticide applications can help prevent springtails climbing a structure's foundation during wet events. Before using any insecticides, read manufacturer's label carefully. Follow all directions and safety precautions, and never over apply.