

# SUMMER HEAT ENTICES PESKY BUGS

Well, so much for the extended spring I was hoping for. It looks like the heat of summer already is here. I went kayak fishing with several friends over toward the gulf in the backwaters of Ozello on Saturday, and from the number of bites we got, the Redfish appetites already are responding to the warming water.

It seemed like it was only a month ago that it was still too cold for them to really start biting consistently. If only all the biting insects will hold off for a bit longer as well.

The shrubs and turf that got damaged, due to the freezing nights in January, already are well on their way to recovery by sprouting back from seemingly lifeless stems. The landscape renovations to install Florida-friendly, rough-tolerant plants throughout The Villages that the Districts started last year have begun once again.

We were able to resume plant replacements the beginning of April and are mostly back in full swing in some of the areas, although some of the plant varieties and sizes that we selected were difficult to find due to the heavy demand in other areas of Florida.

The availability and sizes are getting better every week though, thanks to the warmer weather.

Along with all the desirable plants responding to the hotter days by extra growth, the weeds and other unwanted plants are thriving right along side the turf in the open areas and among the shrubs in the beds.

As Landscape Manager, this has got to be my hot button and something everyone from our subcontractors to homeowners in our area has to deal with on an ongoing basis. More than anything

ERIK  
**KNUDSEN**  
COLUMNIST



else, I think weeds really bug me the most when I look at an otherwise beautifully landscaped area.

Speaking of bugs, this is the time of the year when a lot of calls are received from concerned residents about the hoards of insects that seem to just suddenly show up and are attracted to the lights of homes or businesses, entry signs, recreation centers and postal stations.

The one insect that generates the most calls though is commonly known as blind mosquitoes, or midges. If you have lived near the water in Florida for long, you know what they are.

Blind mosquitoes do not bite or suck blood as they do not have any mouth parts. What they do however, is congregate in large numbers, especially around any type of light, in areas or in the vicinity of our natural or man-made retention areas.

The larvae feed and mature in the sediment at the bottom of lakes, retention ponds or practically any body of water, and are the worst in our area between April and November.

Unfortunately there are no labeled pesticides that will provide satisfactory control for these pests, especially with the emphasis today on the environment, and concerns about what repeated chemical treatment can do to water quality and to various forms of beneficial wildlife.

Some types of residual insecticides can provide temporary control, but they will not get to the root of the problem, and have proved

very costly.

There is ongoing research looking into predators and naturally occurring diseases of the blind mosquitoes, as well as investigating forms of biological control agents that might eventually prove to be effective as well as being more environmentally friendly.

Although it seems, for now, we will have to live with the swarms of blind mosquitoes until an effective method of controlling them is developed, the Districts are actively doing what they can to keep our areas as clean as is economically feasible by pressure washing the entries and around lights to our affected recreation centers and postal stations once a month.

More often than not this has proven to shorten the life of the painted surfaces, and in some instances, actually voids our warranty provided on the paint by the manufacturer and/or painting contractor.

After the outside walls, ceilings and corners of a building or entry sign are pressure washed, a product is applied in some areas with a hand sprayer that will actually discourage spiders and the resulting webs they make, that in the past have served to snare large numbers of blind mosquitoes.

So, until an effective control is developed, these pesky critters will remain a fact of life, and one of the prices we pay for living in paradise.

So just remember to keep on smiling, even when the midges are hitting the windshield of your golf cart when you are driving back home at night after spending the evening out with good friends in "Florida's Friendliest Hometown," and I look forward to talking to you soon at "Our Place."

*Erik Knudsen can be reached at [erik.knudsen@districtgov.org](mailto:erik.knudsen@districtgov.org).*