

NON-BITING MIDGES

Warm weather brings complaints of mosquitoes, gnats and midges. Midge sightings usually begin in April and continue through June. The season starts again in October and runs through November. Midges are insects that often are mistaken for mosquitoes, and are commonly called blind mosquitoes. They don't bite but can cause quite a nuisance because of the tremendous numbers that are produced.

Midges begin their life as worm like larvae that live in lakes, ponds and rivers. The larvae feed on algae and organic material found in the water. The higher the organic content of a body of water the more likely it is to harbor midges. There are four stages in the midge life cycle – egg, larva, pupa, and adult. The eggs are laid on the surface of the water in a gelatinous mass of 800 to 3000 eggs. They hatch in 2 to 7 days. The larvae leave the egg mass and build small tubes in the bottom of the lake or pond. Here they feed and grow taking on a deep red color. At this stage they are often referred to as bloodworms. The larval stage lasts from 15 to 48 days. They then change into pupae and after approximately 3 days emerge from their tubes and swim to the surface of the water to begin their lives as adult midges. Adults emerge primarily at night but there are also occasional daytime emergences. Because they don't feed, they survive only 3 to 5 days.

Adult emergences can be unnerving to people who have never experienced them. Enormous numbers of midges migrate off the lake in a mating flight. They are carried to shore by wind. Midges are attracted to light and paint. People who live on the down wind side of a midge lake can wake up to find their houses and cars covered with these tiny insects. They die in such great numbers that they create a smell similar to dead fish. In some areas thousands of dollars are spent each year cleaning up after an explosive midge emergence. Their droppings damage paint on buildings and cars. Midges emerge in such numbers, that piles of dead bodies 3 feet deep have been measured on sidewalks in front of stores. Midges have even stopped construction of homes on the side of lakes because of the danger of workers falling off the roof due to their dead bodies making the roof too slick to walk on.

Control measures against midges are not very effective. Short term relief can be accomplished by individuals using fogging units that can be purchased at any hardware store. However, this is only a temporary solution to the problem. It is effective, for example, if one is planning a backyard party and understands that control is only partial and effective for a few hours.

Midges breed in lakes and ponds in large numbers mainly due to the pollution of the water. Lakes bordering housing developments quickly become midge lakes due to excess run off of nutrients such as fertilizers. As pollution increases the populations of midges explode. Midges do have a place in the environment. They are a food source for other organisms, especially fish. Some of Florida's best fishing lakes are also home to midges.