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## Those bugs you love to hate are back

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VERO BEACH — Tina Morris, of Palm City, had to pull off the road at 4 p.m. Wednesday en route to pick up two sons, Cody and Carson, from Hidden Oaks Middle School in her community.

Her windshield was blanketed, said her mother, Elizabeth Murray

It is love bug season, again.

Twice a year, spring and fall, love bugs emerge in mass from months of living in the soil, briefly taking flight to obliviously mate in air — much to the aghast of motorists, house painters and others .

The soft, fleshy insects end up as splats on windshields of fast-moving vehicles.

While Morris was steering off the road, her father, Air Force retiree Bill Murray, was running around with spray can of insecticide, driving off a mass of the bugs congregated at the front of his Palm City house.

"Thankfully they are gone," he said Thursday. "I hope they stay away."

Love bugs die within days of emerging from the ground where they spend virtually all their six-month-long lives. But before dying, females lay batches of eggs for the next generation. Those will emerge from the soil next spring, generally from April to May.

The seasonal emergence of love bugs can last up to five weeks. But because they don't bite or sting, the state doesn't spend money on eradicating them, said Dr. George O'Meara with the Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory, Vero Beach.

O'Meara said they are known as Florida black snow. So far, though, no one has found a practical way of controlling the bugs in large open areas.

Some places get worse infestations than others. Bill Murray saw few love bugs when driving home from West Palm Beach, he said.

Love bugs are attracted to heat and exhaust fumes, said Dan Culbert, an agent with the Okeechobee County Extension Service. That may be because the fumes are reminiscent of the smells of decaying vegetable matter in which they lay eggs. Hot engines and vibrations of vehicles also apparently attract the bugs to highways.

On high-speed highways, windshields, hoods and grills can become thickly coated with dead love bugs in minutes. Services plazas on Florida's Turnpike have high-pressure washers for helping motorists clear their cars, O'Meara said. If left in place for a few days, the bug goo can mar a vehicle's paint. At home, people may wash them off with a garden hose with an adjustable nozzle to focus the spray.

What love bugs are good for is helping with decomposition of plant material when they are still living in the ground. Birds eat them, as do armadillos.

Otherwise, they are just those small flying things that can get into hair, mess up windshields and mar drying coats of paint.

"It's a mess, especially on porches," said painting contractor Richard Schlitt, of Vero Beach. "They lay all over it. Then all you can do is wait for the paint to dry, sand it off and start over again."



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Peter Victoria of Vero Beach cleans love bugs off the windshield of his gravel hauling truck at a Chevron gas station on State Route 60 near Interstate 95 on Thursday afternoon. The owner of East Coast Earthworks and Excavating said he moved from Delray Beach in the past year and didn't have to deal with their annual appearances when he lived further south. "They're just annoying," said Victoria. "This isn't even a day's worth." He planned on cleaning the rest of his windshield off with a hose when he got home.

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