TURF TWISTERS

BEETLES

Question: Small, shiny, black beetles are often seen scurrying across the greens. We often find them in or around partially filled aeration holes. Are these black turfgrass Ataenius beetles, and what should we use to control them? (Illinois)

Answer: Fast-moving beetles are most likely ground beetles or rove beetles. Neither feeds on turfgrass, and they probably are seeking cutworms or other insects in the aeration holes. Ataenius beetles crawl very slowly and usually burrow into the turf as soon as they land on the putting surface. Beneficial insects such as rove and ground beetles are extremely sensitive to pesticides, so always make a positive identification before spraying.

BUGS

Question: I have large black-and-yellow wasps in my sand bunkers during the summer. They scare the golfers, but no one has yet been stung. I’m reluctant to make an insecticide application in the bunkers unless it’s absolutely necessary. Are these wasps dangerous, and how do I get rid of them? (Indiana)

Answer: Wait a minute! The insect you describe is probably a beneficial insect called cicada killer or a closely related species. The aggressive males hover above the burrows but don’t possess a stinger and are harmless. Females will sting when provoked, but have little nest-guarding instinct. In fact, cicada killer wasps are considered beneficial because they capture many pest insects and use them as food for their young. Control of the more aggressive yellow jackets and hornets is prudent when they pose a threat to golfers. We agree with your reluctance to spray bunkers to control these wasps.

AND BITES

Question: Fire ants can be a real pain, in more ways than one. What is the latest on effective control measures for these nuisance pests? (Florida)

Answer: Fire ants inflict a repeated sting that produces a burning itch. Unfortunately, there is no new miracle cure on the market for their eradication. Here are a couple of hints, however, to help control these pests. When using a granular or powder insecticide to spot treat fire ant mounds, apply the product only when the area is free of surface moisture or dew. When these materials become wet, the ants’ ability to carry these materials into the mound is diminished and the product is ineffective. Also, resist the temptation to stir up the mound. This disrupts the ants’ normal behavior and further decreases effective control. Last, but not least, always apply pesticides at the manufacturer’s label recommendations and wear appropriate protective clothing.