

Those Pesky No-See-Ums!

Unofficially, they are the visitor who came to visit and overstayed their welcome! Officially, they are known as one of the species in the genus *Culicoides* in the Ceratopogonidae family. Commonly, we call them no-see-ums. They are also colloquially known as biting midges. Note that according to the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agriculture (UF/IFAS), no-see-ums are often mistakenly called sand flies. However, sand flies belong to a different biological group and are not the same beast. Yet we all know who they are, no matter what they're called! They're those annoying small flies that swarm, bite, and generally annoy.

Only between one and three millimeters long, these little critters often have bites more severe than a mosquito. In fact, their bites, which can start out as a small red dot that itches insanely, can eventually expand to a large, raised welt and last for up to two weeks. True to their name, they're difficult to spot, but you'll definitely notice their presence if you have the misfortune of being bitten by them. They're known to feed on the blood of humans and animals, leaving their itchy, uncomfortable bite marks behind.

More severe than mosquito bites, no-see-um bites look like small clusters of red dots on the skin. Over time, they might expand into large, raised welts that can stay on the skin for as long as two weeks. They tend to breed in wet sand, and prefer humidity, so it's no wonder they've found a permanent home in Southwest Florida. Most active in the early hours and late

evenings, they're drawn to our body, heat, carbon dioxide, and the lactic acid on our skin. This relays to the female no-see-um that there's blood nearby, whetting her appetite for a veritable feast. Believe it or not, they also may be attracted to darker clothing.



Sadly, insecticides are ineffective and not environmentally sound as preventives against adult no-see-ums, as they are continually hatching and re-entering our living spaces. The UF/IFAS recommends installing “no-see-um screen” in lanai cages and windows. This encompasses screening with openings smaller than 16-mesh netting, meaning there needs to be in excess of 16 small screen openings within a square inch of screen.

According to the University of Florida, the major medical issue associated with no-see-ums is the potential for an allergic reaction to the bites. To make matters worse, these miniscule critters are “vectors of pathogens,” meaning they can carry diseases in humans and animals. Thankfully, most if not all of their transmissible diseases occur in other tropical or sub-tropical areas outside of Southwest Florida. (And as Bill Murray would say in *Caddyshack*, “So I’ve got that going for me. Which is nice.” See [UF/IFAS FMI](#).)