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Mosquitoes Potentially Carrying West Nile Virus Soon to Appear

The recent heavy rains caused many pools of water to occur in Texas. This means we are encountering more of the floodwater mosquitoes, such as *Aedes vexans* and container-breeding mosquitoes, such as *Aedes albopictus* (the Asian tiger mosquito). Also as the weather warms and things begin to dry out, we can expect to see more of the southern house mosquito, *Culex quinquefasciatus*. This mosquito is the main mosquito responsible for transmitting West Nile Virus.

We can reduce some of the mosquito populations, especially the container breeding mosquitoes by simply emptying containers. It is important to walk around your home and landscape to make sure that wheelbarrows, wading pools, and any other backyard items that collect and hold water are emptied. Also if water must sit in containers, such as in bird baths or pet's dishes, then remember to change the water at least once a week.

If outdoor activities can not be avoided, then it is important to apply insect repellents as a precaution. There are many different products that can be applied in order to prevent mosquitoes from biting. One choice is N,N-diethyl meta-toluamide or commonly known as DEET. Picaridin is another synthetic insect repellent that can be found at any retailer. Also oil of lemon eucalyptus is an example of a natural insect repellents.

Picture of Asian Tiger Mosquito, *Aedes albopictus* (Skuse) (Diptera: Culicidae). Photo by Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist.

Are Azalea Bark Scales Attacking Your Crape Myrtles?

The azalea bark scale, *Eriococcus azaleae* Comstock, is not a new pest since it was discovered on outdoor azalea plantings throughout the South in 1881. However, it was found in Dallas attacking crape myrtles three years ago. This seems to be a new host plant for the azalea bark scale and the population seems to be expanding year after year into new areas.

These scales appear white in color, since they will be covered with waxy secretions. They can be found anywhere on the plant, but tend to be found mainly in the branch crotches and pruning wounds. The females can lay around 50-250 reddish eggs and they will protect them under their bodies. Once the eggs hatch, the nymphs (crawlers) are light yellow in color and will crawl to a new location to begin feeding. This scale usually has two generations per year and overwinters in the egg or nymphal stage.

One of the first signs of infestation to look for is the presence of sooty mold that will appear on the trunk and branches of crape myrtles. You will also notice the presence of honeydew on limbs and leaves.

Unfortunately these scales are hard to control and control recommendations for Texas are still being developed. One suggestion is to mix dishwashing soap with water and wash the trunk and branches with a brush. This will remove many of the female scales and eggs. It will also remove some of the sooty mold. Systemic insecticides such

as something containing imidacloprid or acephate can also be used to control these scales. In addition, insecticidal sprays containing such chemicals as malathion or bifenthrin will provide control when the scale is in the crawler stage. It is believed that March to mid-April will be the best time to spray. Also in the winter, dormant oil applications to the bark and crotches will provide control. Remember that the plant must be thoroughly covered when treating with oil.

Please visit http://citybugs.tamu.edu for more information.

Photo of azalea bark scale, *Eriococcus azaleae* Comstock, on crape myrtle. Photo by: Michael Merchant, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

Attack of the Cicada Killers

Cicada killers are active during July and August, coinciding with the appearance of cicadas which they sting and paralyze. Cicadas are large insects that "sing" in trees during late summer. The female cicada killer stings the cicada, then turns the cicada on its back, and drags the cicada into a burrow. The female cicada killers usually dig burrows in areas that are sandy, bare, and exposed to full sunlight. They prefer to nest in areas of little vegetation, compared to thick areas of turf. Each female cicada killer will capture at least one cicada and a single egg is laid in the cicada before being sealed off. Even though an area may contain many burrows, female cicada killers are solitary. This means that each female constructs a burrow and captures her own cicadas to serve as food for her developing young.

The cicada killer develops through complete metamorphosis: egg, larva, pupae and adult stage. In two to three days, the egg hatches. Depending on the number of

cicadas in its burrow, the cicada killer larva can feed for 4 to 10 days. Pupation occurs in the spring and then the adult emerges in mid-June to early July. Adults will continue to emerge throughout the summer until mid-August. There is only one generation a year.

Adult cicada killers feed on flower nectar and sap. The female wasps are usually non-aggressive and rarely sting unless touched or disturbed. Male cicada killers are usually aggressive and tend to defend nesting sites. However males lack a stinger, so they are harmless.

Non-Chemical Control Options:

Apply fertilizers and water to promote growth of turf. Also place mulch in flowerbeds and around shrubs to cover exposed soil.

Chemical Control Options:

Control is usually not recommended, since this is a beneficial insect. If control is necessary, locate the nests during the daylight hours. Then at night or before dawn, sprinkle about 1 tablespoon of insecticidal dust such as those containing carbaryl into the burrow and then close the entrance of the burrow with your foot. Other suggestions for spray treatments that are labeled for wasp control include acephate, allethrin, cyfluthrin, cypermethrin, permethrin, and resmethrin as active ingredients. Repeat treatments may be needed for two to three weeks as new wasps move into the area.

Cicada killer, Sphecius speciosus (Hymenoptera: Sphecidae). Photo by Bart Drees.

Mention of commercial products is for educational purposes only and does not represent endorsement by Texas Cooperative Extension or The Texas A&M University System. Insecticide label registrations are subject to change, and changes may have occurred since this publication was printed. The pesticide user is always responsible for applying products in accordance with label directions. Always read and carefully follow the instructions on the container label.