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Buzzing Boxelder Bug Alert

As the temperatures fall, one insect that begins seeking an overwintering shelter indoors are boxelder bugs. These bugs tend to cluster in large numbers on the sides of trees and structures, so they can easily enter structures by flying through windows, open doors or vent openings. Once they invade structures, they only live a few days and do not reproduce. However, their fecal matter can stain curtains, paper and other home furnishings. Also their mouthparts can penetrate human skin, so beware when handling.

Adult boxelder bugs are 1/2 inches in length, brownish-black in color with three lengthwise red stripes near their heads. Their wings are thick and leathery at the base and membranous at the tip, making them a true bug. Under their wings, their abdomen is red. The immature boxelder bugs resemble the adults in shape, except they are smaller, wingless and bright red.

Boxelder trees are used in landscapes, since they grow quickly, reaching heights of 30 to 50 feet. However, they are prone to attack by boxelder bugs. These bugs feed primarily on the seed-bearing boxelder trees (female trees) by sucking sap from the leaves, twigs and developing seeds. They will also feed on other trees such as ash, maple, plum and apple, causing scarring of fruits.

During the fall months, adults and immature boxelder bugs congregate usually on the female boxelder trees and then begin migrating to a place for overwintering. Only adults overwinter by moving to hibernation sites either by crawling or flying. The adults that have overwintered will leave when warm weather arrives. The females then lay eggs in crevices of tree bark, stones, leaves, grasses and on other objects near host plants.

Some Options for Control:

Non-Chemical Control Options:

Eliminate hiding places such as piles of boards, rocks, leaves, grass and other debris close to the house.

Caulk and close openings where boxelder bugs can enter the house such as around light fixtures, doors and windows, unscreened vents, utility pipes and air conditioners.

Screen all windows, doors, crawl spaces, roof vents, since they are attracted to light and can fly in through doors and windows.

Removal of the female boxelder trees from the landscape would decrease this insect's population.

Use a vacuum cleaner or broom to collect the bugs for easy removal.

Chemical Control:

If you do not wish to remove female boxelder trees, then the exposed immature boxelder bugs can be chemically treated in the spring and early summer. Some treatments include insecticidal soap or other products containing the active ingredients acephate, permethrin, or cyfluthrin. For tall trees or large areas, specialized equipment may be required. Also cracks, crevices or possible entry point/hiding places where the boxelder bugs could enter should be treated. A dust or aerosol spray can be used to give temporary control indoors. Remember that boxelder bugs do not live more than a few days indoors, do not breed inside, and are essentially harmless.



Adult boxelder bug, *Boisea trivittatus*. Photo by Elizabeth “Wizzie” Brown, Program Specialist-IPM, Texas AgriLife Extension.

The Lovely Crickets Are Calling

As we walk outside in the evening, a new sound might greet us. This new sound might be a male cricket’s mating song, which is a high-pitched sound produced by the male cricket rubbing his front wings together to attract a female.

Adult field crickets are $\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, black in color and have a stout body. They develop through simple metamorphosis with an egg, nymph and adult stage. The female cricket will deposit eggs into the soil. The eggs hatch into nymphs, which gain wings every time they molt. Several generations of crickets are produced every year.

Crickets feed on all organic matter, including decaying plant material and fungi. Since crickets breakdown plant materials, they are considered beneficial by renewing soil minerals. They are also a food source for many animals such as spiders, ground beetles, birds, lizards and small rodents.

Crickets are normally found outdoors, living under rocks, logs or in any crack or crevice. Since they live next to our homes, their song can become an irritant to homeowners. Also, they can enter our homes through such areas as doors and windows.

Some Control Options:

Some Non-chemical Suggestions:

- 1) Caulk or seal cracks and gaps that are found in the foundation, around doors, windows, and garage doors.
- 2) Trim weeds and tall grass growing near the foundation.
- 3) Remove firewood, rotting wood, boxes, bricks, stones and other objects from around the structure, in order to reduce the number of harborage areas.
- 4) For crickets found inside the home, vacuum or sweep up and discard them.

Some Chemical Control Suggestions:

If a severe infestation exists, there are granular products that can be used for control, such as those containing hydramethylnon. There are also chemicals that can be sprayed outdoors to provide a barrier around homes, such as pyrethrins or bifenthrin. There are also products that can be applied indoors and outdoors in cracks and crevices, such as those containing boric acid.



A field cricket, *Gryllus* sp. (Orthoptera: Gryllidae). Photo by Dr. Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

Spiders in Texas

As winter weather approaches, spiders are sure to come inside the home. Spiders are closely related to ticks and scorpions, all belonging to the Class Arachnida. Most spiders are small and considered harmless to humans. In fact, they are beneficial to our environment by controlling insect populations. However there are two groups in Texas that are considered harmful to humans, the black widows and the recluse spiders. As a warning, all spiders will bite if provoked. Also many people are very afraid of spiders, a condition called arachnophobia.

Dangerous Spiders:

Recluse Spiders

There are five species found in Texas, but only two species are considered dangerous. Their color varies from orange-yellow to dark brown and they are the about the size of a quarter. Their most distinguishing characteristic is the eye pattern and the violin marking on the top side of its first body region, the cephalothroax. These spiders have six eyes arranged in three pairs, forming a semi-circle. The eyes also form the base of the violin shape that extends to its abdomen.

Recluse spiders are shy and will hide during the day. They are most active at night, so people are usually bitten at night. Recluse spiders are usually found in garages, wood piles, cluttered attics, closets bathrooms, bedrooms, and under furniture.

The recluse spiders' bite may cause effects immediately or be delayed, depending upon the amount of venom injected. The bite usually causes a stinging sensation followed by intense pain. Within 24 to 36 hours, fever, chills, nausea, weakness, and joint pain may result from the bite. The bite will also produce a blister surrounded by a swollen area. The venom kills the skin tissue, which gradually sloughs away until medical attention is sought.



Recluse spider (Genus *Loxosceles*).

Widow Spiders

There are four species of widow spiders that exist in Texas. Their color varies from brown to black, but all have a marking consisting of two united triangles that can be red, yellow or orange in color. This hourglass marking is found on the underside of their abdomen. The females are 1 ½ inches in length and have eight eyes in two rows, which is a common eye pattern for spiders. Females in a few species of widow spiders will eat the males after mating, which gives this group its name.

They usually live in protected areas around houses and may live in garages, basements, furniture, shrubbery, rain spouts, gas and electric meters and in other undisturbed areas. They spin coarse irregular webs that expand as the spider matures.

The widow's bite may initially feel like a pin prick that leaves a swollen area with two red spots in the middle. The pain usually becomes worse, causing high temperatures, tremors, nausea, vomiting, leg cramps, perspiration, loss of muscle tone and rise in blood pressure and even death. However, death results in less than 5% of the people bitten by a widow spider.



Widow spiders (Genus Latrodectus).

Other Common Spiders:

Tarantulas

These are large, hairy spiders that vary in color from brown to black. Adults are usually more than 3 inches in length. They tend to spend the day in hidden areas or under rocks and hunt at night feeding on crickets, caterpillars, and other insects. Since they are spiders, they can bite; however, their toxin is not considered harmful to most people. Also they possess hairs that can penetrate the skin, which cause irritation.

Wolf Spiders

These spiders vary in color from brown to black and some have longitudinal stripes running along their bodies. Wolf spiders are large and can be seen at night under lights. They frequently enter homes and in landscapes, but their toxin is not considered harmful to humans.

Southern House Spider

These spiders sometimes are confused with recluse spiders, but they are larger than recluse spiders. Also they are dark brown in color, have eight eyes all in one cluster, and lack the violin marking. Southern house spiders have distinctive webs that radiate from a central mass that is located in a hole or crevice. These spiders are most commonly found in old barns and in undisturbed areas within human structures. However, their toxin is considered harmless.

Spider Bites

To relieve swelling, apply an ice pack or alcohol directly to the bite. If a severe allergic reaction occurs, a doctor should be consulted immediately. It is always helpful to take the spider along to the doctor/hospital for positive identification.

Controlling Spiders

Non-Chemical Controls:

Seal cracks using caulk, weather stripping, and screens to prevent spider entry into the home. Make sure that all stored boxes are taped and sealed to prevent spiders from entering. Also, vacuum webs throughout homes. Since some spiders lay their eggs within the webs, vacuuming will prevent these eggs from hatching.

Chemical Controls:

Only use products labeled for spider control or in areas where spiders are found. These products can contain such chemicals as permethrin, deltamethrin, or bifenthrin. Outside spray or dust under roof eaves, porches, and window ledges. Inside spray around windows, door frames, baseboards and in attics and other places of storage. Some spiders are hard to control, so it is best to contact a pest control professional.

Aggregating Lady Beetles

This is a simple case of a “good” guy gone “bad!” The Multi-Colored Asian Lady Beetle is an introduced insect species from Asia that is used to control landscape insect pests in the United States. They have now established themselves in many areas of the U.S., where they reduce populations of aphids and scale insects. However, this lady beetle likes to congregate in large numbers around buildings when they overwinter. This causes them to sometimes move indoors into living areas. These beetles exude a

yellowish liquid when disturbed (reflux bleeding), which can stain fabric and can cause skin irritation. They can also bite, which causes a welt to form on the skin!

Exclusion practices should be used to prevent these ladybeetles from entering the structure. All cracks and crevices, such as around windows, doors, air conditioners, and utility pipes should be sealed in late summer and fall. If beetles are spotted inside the home, then a vacuum should be used to remove them. Remember to dispose of the vacuum bag outside, so the beetles do not escape and re-invade the structure.



Multicolored Asian Ladybeetle. Photo by Mike Merchant, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

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