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Scorpion Flies Swarm North Texas

As you stroll through the woods this fall, you might notice an interesting insect called a scorpion fly, *Panorpa nuptialis*. This insect is found in the South Central U.S. in wooded areas, near water or in grasslands. Their bodies are around 1 inch in length with snout-like mouthparts and yellow bands on their wings. The male's genitalia resemble a scorpion's stinger, hence the common name. They are not strong fliers so they are easy to capture.

Adults feed mainly on dead insects but they can also feed on pollen and nectar; while the larvae feed on dead insects. Before mating, the males will emit a pheromone from their abdomen to attract females. The males will then offer the attracted female a gift. Females often select their mating partners based on this gift offering of prey.

Although scorpion flies may appear scary, especially the males, they do not sting or bite.



Photo of a scorpion fly, *Panorpa nuptialis* Gerst (Mecoptera: Panorpidae), female. Photo by Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

Fall Armyworms Marching In

The fall armyworm, *Spodoptera frugiperda*, consume foliage of many different plants, including turfgrass, shrubs, and agricultural crops. Large populations can consume grasses down to the ground, causing circular bare spots in the lawn. Armyworms have four life stages: egg, larva, pupa and adult. The eggs are very small, and are laid on leaves at night. The larvae hatch from the eggs and feed mostly at night and tend to hide in thatch and debris in the daytime. The young larvae are white with black heads with a white line forming an inverted “Y,” with stripes along the body as it matures. The larvae pupate in the soil. Then the adult moths emerge, mate and lay eggs.

The location of large populations of armyworms varies each year. However warm, humid climates, along with large amounts of thatch are favorable conditions for fall armyworms to multiply. Armyworms should be controlled when they occur in large numbers or plant damage becomes excessive.

Some Control Options:

Some Non-Chemical Control Options:

Eliminate thatch to reduce potential habitats for armyworms. Parasites such as wasps and flies are very effective against armyworms. Also predators, such as ground beetles and birds are also effective at controlling armyworms.

Some Chemical Control Options:

Armyworms can be controlled using such insecticides containing the active ingredients such as permethrin, cyfluthrin, bifenthrin, halofenozide and spinosad. Spot treatments or whole lawn treatments can be effective, depending on the size of the armyworm population.

Photo of fall armyworm. Photo by Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

Boxelder Bug Sightings

Boxelder trees are sometimes planted 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 female seed-bearing boxelder 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.

Adult boxelder bugs are ½ inches in length, brownish-black in color with three lengthwise red stripes near their heads. Under their wings, their abdomen is red. The immature boxelder bugs resemble the adults in shape, except they are smaller, wingless and bright red in color.

During the fall months, adults and immature boxelder bugs tend to congregate on the female boxelder trees and then begin migrating to a place to overwinter. Only adults overwinter by moving to hibernation sites either by crawling or flying. These bugs tend to cluster in large numbers on the sides of trees and structures, so they can easily enter structures under windows sills or through open doors or vents. If they do invade structures, their feces can stain curtains, paper and other home furnishings. Also their mouthparts can penetrate human skin, so beware when touching them.

The boxelder bugs that happen to enter indoors, will not live more than a few days indoors, do not breed inside, and are essentially harmless.

Some Options for Control:

Some Non-Chemical Control Options:

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

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, utility pipes and air conditioners.

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

Some Chemical Control Options:

If you do not wish to remove female boxelder trees from the landscape, then the exposed immature boxelder bugs can be chemically treated in the spring and early summer. Insecticides containing the active ingredients such as neem, pyrethrin, rotenone, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, esfenvalerate and malathion can be used. Specialized equipment may be required to treat tall trees.



Photo of boxelder bug. Photo by Elizabeth “Wizzie” Brown, Program Specialist-IPM, Texas AgriLife Extension.

Fall Means Treating for Fire Ants

Due to the recent rains and cooler weather, the fire ants have been expressing their presence in the landscape by mounding. Since fire ants are a medially important insect pest, steps should be taken for controlling them this fall in order to decrease the population next spring. One method for treatment is to broadcast a fire ant bait. Fire ant baits are made from defatted corn grit that is covered with an insecticide and soybean oil. Before broadcasting the fire ant bait, foraging activity should be evaluated by placing a potato chip or hot dog next to a mound. If the fire ants find the chip or hot dog within fifteen minutes, then it is an appropriate time to broadcast the fire ant bait. Fire ants will typically actively forage when the soil surface temperature is between 65 and 95° F. Fire ant baits should never be watered into the soil and they should not be used if they smell rancid. Fire ant baits can be broadcast using a hand-held spreader for small areas or a Herd Seeder can be mounted onto a truck or ATV for larger areas. For more information, please visit the fire ant webpage at <http://fireant.tamu.edu>.



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