



ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM/ LIMESTONE COUNTY OFFICE

The Garden Spot For week of September 28, 2009

Protect Your Home From the Fall Insect Invasion

The days are getting shorter, and the nights are growing cooler. These are the signals that tell insects that it's time to start looking for a place to spend the winter. And because of the heat and light given off by our homes, we shouldn't be surprised when insects try to use them for their winter "bugalows."

The best way to protect your home from invaders is to physically deny them entrance. Door sweeps, weather stripping, and caulk can be applied to outside doors, to prevent insects and other invaders from crawling inside. Caulk should also be used around all ground-level windows or doors, especially around walk-in basements. Any opening to the outside (for pipes and wires) should be sealed. Any gaps and tears in screens should be repaired, or the screens replaced. Make sure all windows fit tightly in their frames. Hardware cloth (quarter inch wire mesh) should be installed over attic, roof, and crawl space vents in order to prevent entry of birds, bats, squirrels, rodents, and other wildlife.

As a last resort, insecticides can be sprayed around the outside perimeter foundation. Read and follow all label directions! Pesticide treatments will help reduce insect invasion, but unless the other preventative measures are taken, pesticides alone will not be sufficient.

If insects DO manage to get inside the house, think before you stomp! Some of the insects, like boxelder bugs and clover mites, leave red stains when they are squished. Ladybugs may give off a foul odor when crushed, as will millipedes. It's best to vacuum them up, and dump the bag outside (or place it outdoors in the trash). Vacuuming does not kill the insects, and they've been known to climb out of vacuum cleaners and re-infest houses.

Current Challenges:

Asian Woolly Hackberry Aphid: Why is this sticky stuff getting on my car when I park under a hackberry tree? What are all these white things flying around? What's making my hackberry tree turn black?

The Asian woolly hackberry aphid is one of the many 'new' pests that have been accidentally introduced to the state. Adults are about 1/16 inch long and are covered with a white, cotton-like waxy material that makes them conspicuous and relatively easy to identify. It is often difficult to see that there really is an insect under that pile of fluffy white stuff on the leaf. Adults may be winged or wingless. During the past few weeks large numbers of winged adults are being seen in areas where there are a lot of hackberry trees.

Both adults and nymphs produce large amounts of honeydew, which accounts for the sticky accumulations on vehicles parked beneath hackberry trees. Heavy infestations of this pest can cause trees to defoliate prematurely. There is little risk of this pest attacking other plants.

While this insect can be controlled with sprays, few homeowners have the equipment needed to apply treatments to mature trees. Even when equipment is available, foliar sprays are often not an option because of the drift onto adjacent property. For now, the best approach seems to be to live with the situation. They will go away in a few weeks.

If you've seen masses of insects gathering around the base of trees, or clustering on mulch, they are likely **boxelder bugs**, and not really a cause for concern. The insects are either bright red and wingless, or they are black with red markings on their wings.

Boxelder bug nymphs (the bright red critters) feed by sucking sap out of the trees. They prefer boxelder trees, but can also be found on ash, maple, plum, cherry, peach, pear, and other trees. They don't cause any appreciable damage to the trees, and control is not normally needed. They can become a problem in the fall, when they start migrating from the trees in search of shelter from the winter.

Masses of boxelder bugs can easily be killed by pouring boiling water on them. Unless they are congregated close to your door, it's not recommended to spray pesticides on them.

The Asian multi-colored ladybeetle is usually a problem at this time of year. Hundreds of these orange to red ladybugs will congregate on the south and west sides of light colored buildings. They will try to squirm under the shingles and siding of our homes, or will crawl into windows. Despite their nuisance status, these ladybugs ARE beneficial in the environment, and

it is recommended to NOT spray them. If physical barriers alone aren't keeping them out, an insecticide treatment around the outside of their entry places may help repel them.

Spiders are another problem right now. Actually, most of the spiders aren't really a problem to us, other than the annoyance factor of having one crawl over you while you're reading the paper or seeing their webbing decorate the corners of your walls.

Nearly all of these spiders are not serious problems to us. Only the brown recluse and black widow pose threats to humans, and both of these spiders are going to be found hiding somewhere quiet and undisturbed, and not out in the middle of the yard or shrub bed.

So, while we are busy making preparations for cold weather, keep in mind that our critter friends are doing the same.

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