13th Pest Alert

Stinky Kudzu bugs leave Kudzu to invade home and home garden for the winter

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Xing Ping Hu
Department of Entomology
ACES/Auburn University

Photo: Courtesy of Lisha Graham

October brings pleasant cool weather and the changing colors of leaves; however, it also signals a home invasion of nuisance bugs. This time of year is more difficult to enjoy because Alabama residents are experiencing massive home invasion of the stinky kudzu bugs.

Kudzu bugs were busy eating plants all summer. Triggered by the approaching cooler temperatures, they are actively leaving their usual host plants to look for places to spend the winter. Where would that be? Your home and home garden are nice cozy habitats for overwintering. Once on the move, the adults particularly like congregating in masses on light-colored surfaces. During the day they also like to gather in masses in the shade portion of structures regardless of color. This mass migration has caused complaints and inquiries to Extension offices, the media and pest control professionals. They are excellent hitchhikers landing on people, vehicles and buildings. They are good fliers and can fly long distances.

Kudzu bugs are not beetles. They are nuisance stink bugs that secrete a foul odor that can stain wall coverings, fabrics and skin.

The bugs are olive green to brownish with a squared tail. They are about the size of an Asian lady beetle.

Kudzu bugs are native to Asia. It was first detected in northeastern Georgia in October 2009. Now it has spread throughout Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina, and moved into Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, Mississippi and Virginia.
In Alabama, kudzu bugs were first discovered in two counties in 2010. By the next year, they were reported in eight counties, and this year reports confirm them in 43 counties.

As the name would suggest, they like kudzu, but they also move into other crops such as soybeans and green beans. They seem to be particularly active in exploring different plants in spring before leafing of kudzu and in later fall to get the last meal before overwintering.

What should homeowners do to prevent an invasion?

Exclusion is the better answer. Exclusion means sealing and caulking very well, particularly around windows, doors and areas where piping, such as water spigots or air conditioner lines, enter the house. Also, tight sweeps on the bottoms of doors and good screen maintenance will help limit entry into the house.

If homeowners choose to use an insecticide, any pyrethroid insecticide applied directly to the bugs can kill them. Most insecticides available for purchase by consumers are effective at killing the bugs. Homeowners must read and follow the product’s label. It is the law.

Be aware, treating the bugs with pesticides isn’t recommended because of the bug’s mobility and the multitudes of bugs. These bugs can occur in huge numbers meaning you will never kill them all with an insecticide. They tend to move over a period of a few weeks so an insecticide would also have to be used over a period of a few weeks as well. Most of the time you would be spraying a structure, the spray would dry. The structure offers nothing to feed on so control is limited. These bugs don’t all migrate directly into living areas — they fill in gaps in walls and slowly move into the living area. This means getting an insecticide to them is all but impossible.

Even with use of well-timed insecticides and all the caulking and tightening you can do, if these bugs are interested in your house, some of them will find their ways to get in. Remember, they all come with an offensive odor so treat them with care! Do not crush them as they can emit offensive odor and cause stains. The best way to remove them is to vacuum them up. An industrial vacuum works best, as odors can linger in a traditional vacuum. Add 1 to 2 tablespoons of dish liquid per gallon of water then add a few gallons to the vacuum canister. The dish liquid and water will kill any kudzu bugs you vacuum up. If you have to use a traditional vacuum, be sure to throw away the bag as soon as you are done.