

TIMELY INFORMATION

Agriculture & Natural Resources

Nuisance insects of the season – Boxelder Bugs

Xing Ping Hu

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Extension Specialist/ACES/AU

Yesterday I was taken back while cleaning up debris of the flower bed near the bay window of my house. I saw thousands of boxelder bugs (adults, nymphs, and eggs) aggregating and feeding on low vegetation (morning dew, cannon lily, etc.) and crawling on rocks, brick and plastic edgings, and on the ground (I live in Auburn, Lee Count). There were so many of them and they were literarily covered the garden ground.

Their numbers are going to build up high if we will have a hot, dry summer.

Boxelder bugs (scientific name is *Biosea trivittatus*) are not an unfamiliar insect to most of people.

They are about ½-inch long, black with orange or red markings, including 3 stripes behind the head. Wings lay flat over their body. Nymphs are bright red when they first hatch, and grow to turn red and black. Eggs are red in clusters.



(photo from Purdue Plant & Pest Diagnostic Laboratory)

Literatures say this bug is highly specialized feeding almost exclusively on the seeds of boxelder seed pods. However, they do feed on a variety of plants, including maple and ash trees. They also feed on the fruits of cherry, peach, pear, plum, grapes, and apple. My observation adds on morning dews and cannon lily.

Life cycle:

They overwinter as adults in protected places. In the spring when it gets warmed up, the adults come out to feed on and lay eggs on leaves and stones and in cracks and crevices in the bark of female boxelder trees and other low vegetation host plants (there are many little red eggs on the morning-dew plant in my garden). They continue to grow and produce during the summer. In fall when it gets cold, adults seeks protected sites to overwinter, that is when they try to move into homes as they search for overwintering places.

Habits:

They are commonly noticed in later May when you find many nymphs and adults on the ground or in gardens feeding on low vegetation and seeds, also in fall when they. Houses with a large southern or western exposure are likely to attract boxelder bugs.

Though they do not bite or sting people, or cause damage to structure, their congregating habits and excreta can annoy people; and they, when abundant, can stain walls, curtains, and other surfaces with their excrement. Thus they are considered nuisance pests.

Management:

Do you need to apply pesticides?

They are most likely to live outdoors until fall. If you have an extremely high population of them, you may want to supplement non-chemical methods with a chemical treatment to knock down the population now. Another time to consider chemical application is fall when boxelder bugs are first clustering around the outside of buildings.

First consider using laundry detergents, they offer safe, effective control then applied directly to the insects.

The last choice is pesticides. Examples of common names of active ingredients available to the public include: bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, lambda cyhalothrin, permethrin, tralomethrin. You can find the common name for a pesticide by reading the label and looking under *Active Ingredients*. Look for this information under *Directions for Use*.

Non-chemical prevention to fence off the pest from invading homes

The best time to take on the preventive measures is in fall before the bugs seeking overwinter sties.

- Repair or replace damaged window and door screens.
- Repair or replace damaged screens in roof and soffit vents, and in bathroom and kitchen fans.
- Seal areas where cable TV wires, phone lines, and other utility wires and pipes, outdoor facets, dryer vents and similar objects enter buildings.
- Seal with caulk or for larger spaces use polyurethane expandable spray foam, copper mesh, or other appropriate sealant.

- Install door sweeps or thresholds to all exterior entry doors. Install a rubber seal along the bottom of garage doors.
- Calking/sealing any openings of 1/8th inch in size or larger in wall/foundation
- Calking/sealing cracks/crevices and spaces around doors, windows, roof lines, etc.

Indoor management

If you find them indoor, use a vacuum cleaner to control bugs. Household insecticidal aerosols and many household spray cleaners also are effective when applied directly to individual Insects. These measures provide temporary relief only. Bugs may continue to enter the home as they move about on warmer days throughout the fall, winter and early spring. Nuisance infestations should be finished by early June, as the boxelder bugs have either died or moved back to the host trees.