

Ag Column
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What are These Bugs on My House?

Many homes across our area are again inundated with boxelder bugs, stink bugs, and lady beetles. All of these pests are referred to as incidental invaders. Their return usually coincides with cooler weather in October. This year, we are seeing them a little later because of the unusually warm fall. As temperatures warm into the 60s throughout the fall, winter and spring they will again surface causing homeowner's frustration. They seem to disappear during the hotter weather of late spring through early fall. Homeowner calls regarding the control of these pests become very common during periods of moderate temperatures from fall through early spring. Due to their smaller size, lady beetles more often than boxelder bugs and stink bugs find their way into homes.

The lady beetle is red with black spots. The box elder bug is flat, roughly ½ inch long and 1/3 inch wide. It is predominately brownish-black with red stripes. The brown marmorated stink bug is dark brown and slightly larger than the boxelder bug. Its back is shaped like a shield and the bug has an odor if crushed.

All of these pests are flying insects making them difficult to control. Each are trying to find a hibernation site as the October days turn cool. These pests can often cover the sides of houses as they seek warmth. A diluted insecticide along with a dish detergent is usually effective for killing these pests where they congregate in large numbers on houses.

Excluding these insects from structures is a primary defense. This includes using weather stripping, caulking, and expandable foam to seal entry points. Dr. Karen Vail, UT Extension Entomologist, says an opening as small as 1/8 of an inch will allow lady beetles to enter a home. Older homes and log structures are more difficult to seal. Vail suggests caulking window frames, installing door sweeps, garage door seals, and using weather stripping around doors. Entry points into the home such as dryer vents, outdoor faucets, and wiring should also be sealed. Glue boards placed near suspected entry points can help determine where pests are gaining entry to your home. These trouble spots can then be sealed.

When found outside, the bugs can be sprayed with bifenthrin, permethrin, or cyfluthrin. Mixing dish soap with these insecticides also increases efficacy especially when found in masses.

Call your Extension office for more information about these pests.