

Ag Column
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The Boxelder Bugs and Lady Beetles Will Return

We usually see the boxelder bug in large numbers in the fall or sometimes in the spring. In October, it seeks warm surfaces like the sides of homes often becoming a nuisance pest for homeowners.

The box elder bug has two life cycles per year. The three stages of each life cycle are the egg, nymph, and the adult. At this time of year, we are seeing a mix of nymphs and young adults. The bugs are often found congregating in masses in the landscape. The only noticeable difference between the nymph and adult is the larger size and the presence of black wings on the adult. The box elder bug nymphs being seen currently are about 3/16 inch long and are beginning to develop black wings. The major source of food for this bug is box elder trees, but they will also feed on maples, ash, plum, cherry, apple, peach, and grape.

We often see large numbers of lady beetles as well. The best defense is to prevent these insects from coming into your house by spraying an insecticide barrier around the home. Improving exclusion measures around the home such as weather stripping, caulking, securing dryer vents, etc will help keep these bugs out of your home. Once inside your home, it is best to vacuum these insects rather than using insecticides.

These bugs can easily be controlled by spraying with a pyrethrin insecticide. Adding about 1 teaspoon of dishwashing detergent per gallon to the insecticide will increase the efficacy. You can spray the bugs when you find them congregating in masses or you may want to spray your box elder trees to control the population that emerges in the fall.

The invasion of these insects in October may be much worse than usual because of this year's weather. The wet July and August this year may cause the numbers of boxelders to be greater this fall.