

News Article

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Fall Home Invaders

Some insects and spiders will be trying to move into homes as the weather turns colder. Here's a brief overview of some of the more common insects and other arthropods that will be trying to invade our homes this fall.

Asian lady beetles are sometimes called Halloween beetles because of their orange coloring and propensity to show up around Halloween time. Although it's not really an accurate name, "ladybug" is the common name most people use for a lady beetle. Their coloring can vary from orange to red, and they may have zero to several spots on their wing covers. A distinctive black 'M' can be seen behind their head, distinguishing Asian lady beetles from other native species of this normally beneficial insect. Lady beetles spend the winter in sheltered sites, but unlike other lady beetles, the Asian lady beetle is more likely to seek this protection in homes. Because of the sometimes-high populations of the insect, it can become a real nuisance.

Boxelder bugs occasionally cluster on sides of houses, eventually finding their way indoors. Their sheer numbers can alarm anyone. Adult boxelder bugs are black with reddish-orange line markings on their bodies. Nymphs, or immature boxelder bugs, are primarily red. They can cluster in great numbers on their namesake tree, the boxelder.

The real up-and-coming infamous star of the fall home invaders is the brown marmorated stink bug (BMSB). It is relatively new to Indiana, first detected in 2010. I found the first confirmed BMSB in Whitley County in the fall of 2015.

Like all stink bugs, this insect has a shield-shaped body (somewhat like the shape of an interstate highway sign), but it has light bands on the last two segments of each antennae. The insect is a pest on fruits and vegetables, and it is becoming much more common in Indiana and other Midwestern states. In the fall, this insect tries to move into our homes, much like the Asian lady beetle. The stink bug gets its name because it releases a pungent chemical as a defensive mechanism when threatened.

Referring to these pungent chemicals as "aldehydes," Dr. Tim Gibb, Purdue Extension entomologist, recently wrote, "A brown marmorated stink bug has a unique ability to store these chemicals as a very concentrated, extremely smelly liquid, which it can emit (as needed) through holes in the sides of its abdomen." He said that it is a defensive mechanism - meant to protect it from being eaten by birds, lizards, or other animals.

“The magic potion not only reeks to high heaven, it also tastes bad and has even been found to be toxic in some cases,” said Gibb. “However, the bug does it, I can say that it works like a charm, because nothing I know has ever made a habit of eating them.”

I used the term “arthropod” in the opening, which refers to invertebrates with jointed appendages. Insects and spiders are both arthropods, but, as you probably know, insects only have 6 legs.

8-legged spiders are known as arachnids, related to ticks, mites and pseudoscorpions. Most spiders are beneficial creatures, acting as predators of insects. A couple of common spiders that invade homes are wolf spiders and jumping spiders. Though they alarm many people, these spiders are not considered a serious health threat to humans. And, no, they are not baby tarantulas!

To help reduce incidence of entry by these unwanted fall invaders, seal all cracks around windows, doors, and utility entrances. Fix broken screens and window seals. Sanitation, indoors and immediately outside the home, will also help. There are some chemical options that usually involve an application of an insecticide product around the perimeter of your home. If opting for a chemical option, make sure that the product is labeled for the site of application and for the pest or pests you are trying to control. Always read and follow label directions, as these will vary from product to product.

Once inside, your best weapon of choice is probably your vacuum cleaner.