



Boxelder Bug



Normally October is the month this insect becomes a pest. They begin to mass in large numbers on Box elder tree trunks to prepare to overwinter. From the tree the bugs move to wood and rock piles, fallen leaves, and the cracks and crevices of buildings. This is when my telephone starts ringing. I get calls from alarmed homeowners that complain about "some bug" that is all over the exterior of the house, and is also getting inside. I explain that the pest is a Box elder bug, and it is especially attracted to the sunny side of light colored homes. They creep into siding, window and door frames, porches, and cracks in masonry. Box elder bugs **do not** bite, reproduce indoors, cause any structural damage, or cause health problems to humans or pets. Smashing them can stain fabrics and wallpaper. These pests are merely a nuisance.

The current moderate daytime temperatures are confusing to the bugs, it is normal to have a recurrence of the pest in the middle of winter when it is mild. They come out of hiding and become active because it is so warm during the day, it seems like spring to them. As long as it is mild they will congregate on Boxelder trees and light colored homes.

Here is a little background and some control suggestions for this pest. The insects are predominantly attracted to the female Boxelder tree, also called an Ash-leaved maple, *Acer negundo*. Female trees can be identified by their winged seed pods. Boxelder bug eggs hatch in late spring. The newly hatched nymphs feed on the leaves, twigs, and seed pods during the summer without inflicting permanent damage to the trees. The tree is their food source and that

explains the attraction to it. Adult bugs are about ½ inch long, dull black with red markings along the front edges of their wings.

CONTROL - Remove female Boxelder trees around the home, male trees are not as desirable. Eliminate hiding places around the home by removing debris like large rocks, wood, lumber and trash. Caulk cracks and crevices around windows, doors, and foundations to seal off possible entrance areas. Use a hose to wash insects off buildings, mix in insecticidal soap for additional control. Always test a small area of the building first with the soap solution to be sure it does not stain the surface. Use a vacuum, broom or hand to remove the bugs from inside the home. Pesticides are not recommended for use inside the home by non-professionals. Spray Boxelder trees with insecticidal soap or insecticides like Pyrethrin, Dursban, or Diazinon. Always follow label directions when applying pesticides. Most of the ants found in the home are a harmless nuisance. Two species, the large black carpenter ant and the tiny Pharaoh ant, can be more of a problem. Carpenter ants can cause structural damage to the house. Pharaoh ants are persistent and very difficult to control but do not cause damage.

For more information, visit the Home & Garden Publications link:

http://www.hgic.umd.edu/media/documents/BoxelderBug10web_000.pdf

For more information about horticulture or the Master Gardener Program in Frederick County, call the Frederick County Office of the Maryland Cooperative Extension, 301- 600-1596, or visit <http://www.frederick.umd.edu/>. Our mission is to educate Maryland residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes and communities.