

Landscape Insects as Unwanted House Guests

While the occasional stray insect indoors is a common and expected part of life in Rockland County, an invasion of beetles or bugs may be a major nuisance that causes considerable distress. Many insects seek out protected sites in late summer through late fall where they spend the winter as adults in a dormant state. In nature, a suitable wintering site might be under the bark of a tree or in a rock out-cropping. In a suburban setting, homes and other structures often substitute for these natural sites.

These insects do not bite or sting, nor do they cause damage to the home. Many will, however, give off a pungent odor or stain if you handle or crush them; this is part of the insect's defensive strategy. Some bugs also make a buzzing sound when flying.

In many cases, insects find their way into homes through small openings. Normally they remain dormant throughout the cold winter months, living on stored fat. However, inside a warm building they may become active. When this happens, some insects are attracted to windows and doors, especially those on the sunny side of the house, in an attempt to get outside. Most will not survive the winter if they emerge from dormancy.

The following insects are commonly found in Rockland County:
Additional fact sheets are available for each pest.

Boxelder Bug

The adult boxelder bug is about one-half inch in length and brownish-black in color with red stripes on its thorax (middle section) and wing margins. The body is also bright red. Immature bugs or nymphs resemble adults but do not have fully developed wings and are not able to reproduce. Adult boxelder bugs accumulate in large numbers to pass the winter, often entering homes.



Clover Mites

Clover mites are harmless creatures related to spiders and ticks. These eight-legged reddish brown arachnids are smaller than a pinhead and are frequent nuisance pests. When clover mites invade homes, they may overrun floors, walls, furniture, and windowpanes or get into beds and clothing. While they do not cause any injury, they leave blood-red spots that are especially noticeable on linen, curtains, walls, and woodwork. It is difficult to remove these pests without leaving stains. Clover mites are a nuisance to residents in early spring and fall and also during warm periods throughout the winter.



Clover mites breed and feed in lawns, grassy fields, clover and other plants around buildings. The heaviest infestations occur at new home sites; apparently new lawns are a favorite spot. Older lawns that are heavily fertilized are attractive to clover mites as well.

Crickets



The most common crickets we find indoors are dark brown or black field crickets, and light yellow-brown house crickets. Humpbacked camel crickets are occasional visitors. Winged adults are attracted to lights in the summertime and may stray into houses, especially in late summer; they also enter during periods of extreme weather.



Inside homes, crickets may chew and damage fabrics, particularly if the articles are stained with food or perspiration.

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Lady Beetles

These well-known insects, also called ladybugs or ladybird beetles, are quite variable. Native species may be reddish-orange, tan or yellow with black spots, or black with red spots. The naturalized multicolored Asian lady beetle, sometimes nicknamed the Halloween beetle, has many color forms ranging from bright red-orange to pale yellow-orange, with zero to many spots. Unlike our native lady beetles, this species has the tendency to congregate by the hundreds or even thousands, on the sunny side of homes, in the autumn. Lady beetles are beneficial insects important in the biological management of several serious insect pests. Both the adult beetles and larvae feed on aphids, scale insects and mealybugs that are serious plant pests.



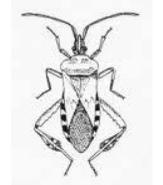
Stink Bugs

The brown marmorated stink bug is an agricultural pest that becomes a nuisance when it enters homes, sometimes in large numbers. This flat, shield-shaped insect is approximately 1/2 to 3/4 inch long. It is a mottled brown with light bands on its antennae and abdomen. The bug feeds on a wide variety of cultivated and weedy plants during the growing season; in early fall it seeks out a protected place to spend the winter. As the name implies, this insect releases an unpleasant odor when disturbed.



Western Conifer Seed Bug

The western conifer seed bug is a leaf-footed bug, and like many members of this family, it has a flattened, leaf-like expansion on its hind legs. The adult is about 3/4 inch in length and is a dull brown with a faint white zigzag strip across the midpoint of its back. When the insect takes flight, it lifts the wings to reveal bright yellowish orange areas on its back. These leaf-footed bugs feed on seeds of conifers such as pine, hemlock, fir and spruce. When these trees are growing near buildings, the bugs may use the structures as an overwintering site.



Management

Physical exclusion, to prevent entry in the first place, is the best way to manage nuisance insects. Screen attic or wall vents, chimneys and fireplaces to block points of entry. Screen ventilation grids to keep these and other insects, such as wasps, out. Contact your local fire department for tips on safety screening or capping these structures. Eliminate or caulk gaps around door and window frames and soffits and tighten up loose fitting screens, windows, doors and weather stripping.

In most cases, use of a pesticide is not necessary. (No pesticides are registered for management of lady beetles, stink bugs or the western conifer seed bug.) Once the insects have entered the structure, use of a pesticide is not helpful, as dead insects that cannot be easily removed may attract more insects that scavenge on the remains. If you already have a few insects inside the home, you can remove them by hand. Use tissue paper or wear rubber gloves to pick them up, or a plastic jar with lid to capture them, and place them back outdoors or dispose of them. Although bugs and lady beetles are not known to be harmful, they do give off an unpleasant odor that persists for some time. Sweep gently to avoid alarming the insects and causing them to discharge odors or fluids that may stain fabric and wall surfaces. You may use a vacuum cleaner to remove insects, though this may cause bugs and lady beetles to release their scent. Empty the vacuum bag or the insects may come out in the storage closet. Any insects that survive the winter will disperse outside when warmer temperatures return in the spring and should not be a problem inside buildings during the summer.

Sources: Carolyn Klass, Sr. Extension Associate, Department of Entomology, Cornell University:

<http://www.entomology.cornell.edu/cals/entomology/extension/idl/idlfactsheetlist.cfm>

Steven B. Jacobs, Sr. Extension Associate, Department of Entomology, Penn State University:

<http://ento.psu.edu/extension/factsheets/brown-marmorated-stink-bug>

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