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JUMPIN' JIMINY CRICKETS

To some people chirping crickets can be like music to their ears while other people will go bonkers until they kill that cricket making all that racket. In late summer when temperatures begin to fall, crickets often enter homes and become a nuisance by damaging stored food or clothing, or by making noise. Crickets have been known to damage plant seedlings, seeds of grain crops and alfalfa, strawberries, tomatoes, and other horticultural crops. In addition, crickets can damage stored tubers or fruits. In hay meadows, crickets often chew through baler twine. On the positive side, crickets often eat large numbers of other insects, some of which are agricultural pests.

Male crickets can "sing," the song produced by either rubbing a leg against a wing or by rubbing one wing against another. This process, called "stridulation," results in a series of chirps. The chirp's function is to attract the female cricket to the male. Each species has a characteristic chirp that is recognized and responded to only by females of the same species. The disadvantage of stridulation is you let everyone know where you are! No wonder why crickets have learned to be quiet when you come around with the heel of your shoe in search of that blankety blank cricket.

Crickets can tell you the temperature within a degree or two by how they chirp. Crickets chirp faster with increasing temperature and slower with decreasing temperatures and is species dependant. Therefore, at least in theory, the temperature can be estimated by counting the chirps. However, problems with putting this theory into practice abound. For example: (1) crickets generally do not sing at temperatures below 55 degrees F or above 100 degrees F, (2) some crickets do not chirp in discrete bursts, they utter a more continuous "trill", (3) chirp rate is affected by other factors such as the cricket's age, mating success, hunger, and with competition from nearby males. Nevertheless, this is a fun inquiry to do.

Crickets can help you predict temperature. The original formula for determining temperature from cricket chirps appears to have been published in 1897 by A.E. Dolbear, a physics professor at Tufts College. The simplest method is to count the number of chirps in 15 seconds and add 40. The sum usually approximates the temperature within a few degrees Fahrenheit. So when your spouse says, "When are YOU going to kill that blankety blank cricket?" You can say, "Hey, I am counting chirps to see what the temperature is."

The first step in cricket control is to check around the outside of your home and caulk or repair cracks and other spaces you find that may allow crickets to get inside. Look carefully around your home's foundation, doors and ground-level windows and utility entrances. You can discourage crickets from entering your home by keeping nearby weeds and grass cut short and by removing piles or stacks of wood, brush, bricks and similar objects that are close to your house. This minimizes their hiding places and reduces the number of crickets that get inside.

If they get inside, don't automatically reach for the aerosol insecticide. You can easily catch crickets by placing sticky glue boards (available at hardware stores, usually for mouse control) in corners of the room. Within a day or two, your crickets will be caught in the glue board. If you've got a chirping cricket inside the house, pour a small amount of cornmeal in the center of a glue



board and place it near where you hear the chirping sound. Within a day or two, you should have gotten your cricket. If large numbers of crickets invade your home, an insecticide barrier five feet wide around the house can be used. Sevin, Diazinon or Baygon are options. Follow label directions for any pesticides that you may use.

For more information about insect control, go to our new website at saline.unl.edu and click on yard and garden and go to pest control. You can also call 821-2151 or email rpryor1@unl.edu.

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