



## Kelly Feehan

*Extension Educator – Community Environment*

2715 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Columbus, NE 68601

[402-563-4901](tel:402-563-4901)

[environment.unl.edu](mailto:environment.unl.edu)

[water.unl.edu/stormwater](http://water.unl.edu/stormwater)

[platte.unl.edu](http://platte.unl.edu)

Twitter: @KellyFeehan2

### Weather Effects on Insects

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator ([kfeehan2@unl.edu](mailto:kfeehan2@unl.edu))

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We have had extremes in weather lately. The warm weather brought an invasion of clover mites in some homes and the cold weather has some people wondering about its effect on overwintering insects.

If you see tiny, reddish specks crawling around windows, doors, or other areas, especially on the sunny side of homes, these are clover mites. Fortunately, they do not cause damage or bite people or pets and they will only be around for a short time.

These tiny mites enter homes through cracks or spaces around windows and doors. Warm weather has caused them to become active and accidentally move indoors. They cannot survive indoors and soon die.

Outdoors, they feed on turfgrass and other plants but rarely, if ever, cause damage. They're viewed as a nuisance pest we have to put up with now and then; and be thankful they're harmless.

For clover mites indoors, do not squish them on fabrics as they leave a red stain. Where feasible, wipe up with a damp cloth or vacuum. A fine layer of talcum powder or baking soda, or double sided tape, can also be placed around windows or other areas where clover mites are entering to trap them.

Clover mites prefer well-fertilized fescue turfgrass. Homeowners who have this type of lawn right up to their house may experience reoccurring invasions.

If you have high numbers of clover mites each spring and fall, focus on preventing their entry into the home. The best way to is to remove grasses and weeds in a three foot strip around foundations, although mites may still cross mulch and pea gravel to enter.

A chemical barrier outside the home can prevent mite entry. Treat a few feet out from the base of the foundation and a few feet up on the walls. To reduce the amount of insecticide used, only treat foundation cracks and around windows or doors instead.

And what about the extreme cold temperatures we had? Did they kill off any pesky or damaging insects? Unfortunately, the answer is usually no.

During fall, insects produce ethylene glycol and other compounds to lower the freezing point of their cells. These compounds, and other factors, determines the supercooling temperature for each insect.

Unless the temperature goes lower than the supercooling threshold for a set period of time, an insect is unlikely to be killed. And these supercooling temperatures can be quite low. For example, the threshold for emerald ash borer can be as low as minus 30 degrees.

We do have one insect that might have been impacted by the extreme cold and that is bagworms. Their supercooling threshold is only one degrees Fahrenheit.

If the temperature falls to one degree and remains there for at least 24 hours, more than 75 percent of bagworm eggs overwintering in female bags can be killed. However, on mild winter days, it would still be a good idea to remove and destroy any bagworms you see on evergreens.

PSAs - March 08, 2021

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator, [kfeehan2@unl.edu](mailto:kfeehan2@unl.edu), 402-563-4901

Warm weather has resulted in clover mites invading homes. If you see tiny, reddish specks crawling around windows, doors, or other areas; especially on the sunny side of homes, these are likely clover mites. There is no need to worry as clover mites do no damage and do not bite people or pets. These tiny mites come into homes through extremely small cracks or spaces around windows and doors. They cannot survive indoors and soon die. Outdoors, they feed on turfgrass and other plants, but do not seem to cause any damage; so they're another one of those nuisance pests we have to put up with now and then, and be thankful they're harmless. For clover mites indoors, do not squish them on fabric as they leave a red stain. Where feasible, wipe up with a damp cloth or vacuum. A fine layer of talcum powder or baking soda, or double sided tape, can also be placed around windows or other areas where clover mites may enter. [kfeehan2@unl.edu](mailto:kfeehan2@unl.edu)

After a period of extreme cold, people will ask if insect populations will be reduced. Unfortunately, the answer is usually no. During fall, insects produce ethylene glycol and other compounds to lower the freezing point of their cells. Ethylene glycol is found in the anti-freeze we add to our car's radiator. This, along with other factors, determines the super-cooling temperature for each insect, and they are unlikely to be killed at temperatures above the super-cooling threshold, which is often quite low. For example, the threshold for emerald ash borer can be as low as minus 30 degrees. We do have one insect that may have been impacted by our extreme cold and that is evergreen bagworms. Their super-cooling threshold is only one degree Fahrenheit. If the temperature falls to one degree and remains there for at least 24 hours, more than 75 percent of bagworm eggs overwintering in female bags on trees can be killed. [kfeehan2@unl.edu](mailto:kfeehan2@unl.edu)

When we experience very cold temperatures, we may see vertical splits in tree trunks, called frost cracks. In most cases, the split did not just happen from the recent cold spell. Most likely, the split had been there for many years; resulting from an earlier injury in the tree. The injury sets up an internal shake line, or defect, in the wood. Intense cold then causes the crack to expand outward to the bark. While frost cracks in tree trunks can close and be covered by bark, the original weakness is still beneath and can rupture to the surface when the trunk is exposed to extreme temperatures. While many trees survive decades with frost cracks that close and reopen, these are indicators of internal defects and if the crack is along a large limb over a house, for example, it should be examined by an arborist to determine if the crack poses a risk. When frost cracks appear, do not cover or treat them with any kind of wound dressing or tree paint. [kfeehan2@unl.edu](mailto:kfeehan2@unl.edu)  
(Source: John Ball, South Dakota State University)

Amaryllis is a holiday plant whose blooms are now fading. Amaryllis is considered fairly easy to re-bloom; and the care they're given from now through summer determines re-blooming success. Once the flowers die, cut the flower stalk off about one inch above the bulb, using a sharp knife. Be sure not to damage the leaves. To be able to re-bloom next season, a plant needs to replenish depleted stored food; and it is only the leaves that produce plant food through photosynthesis. After removing flower stalks, place the Amaryllis in a sunny window and keep the soil moist. Fertilize every 2 to 4 weeks with a houseplant fertilizer, following label directions. Amaryllis can also be summered outdoors. In late May, harden the plant off to the outdoors by gradually exposing it to longer periods of sunlight. Once hardened, sink the container with bulb in the soil in full sun, and water and fertilize throughout the summer. [kfeehan2@unl.edu](mailto:kfeehan2@unl.edu)

Lawns are dormant and should not be fertilized or mowed until after they green up and begin to grow. The fertilization season typically begins about mid to late April; although it would be best for do-it-yourselfers to wait until mid to late May to begin fertilizing. Also, know the recommendation on the number of fertilizations a lawn needs has changed. The general practice has been to make four applications or about four pounds of actual nitrogen applied per year. New research shows four applications may be needed on younger lawns up to about 10 years old. On older lawns, only two applications of fertilizer is needed, especially if grass clippings are left when mowing. Older lawns need fewer applications annually than newer stands. Continuing to over-fertilize turf can lead to excessive thatch accumulation, diseases like brown patch, nitrate leaching to groundwater and it wastes money. [kfeehan2@unl.edu](mailto:kfeehan2@unl.edu)

