



Kelly Feehan

Extension Educator – Community Environment

2715 13th Street, Columbus, NE 68601

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

environment.unl.edu

water.unl.edu/stormwater

platte.unl.edu

Twitter: @KellyFeehan2

Nuisance Insect Home Invaders

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

Release: Week of November 1, 2021

As temperatures cool, we spend more time indoors. So do nuisance insect pests who invade our homes in search of cracks and crevices to hide in for winter.

Incidental invaders do not breed in homes or cause structural damage. They are best managed by sealing entry points to keep them out. Caulk cracks around windows, doors, pipes, and chimneys, replace damaged screens, and fix weather stripping and door seals as needed.

The most common nuisance insects are crickets, boxelder bugs and multicolored Asian lady beetles. A few others we might encounter are cluster flies, brown marmorated stink bugs and millipedes.

Cluster flies are also called attic flies as this is where they tend to be found. They also overwinter in natural tree holes and other cavities. In the home, they tend to gather in large numbers by windows.

Cluster flies are an introduced species from Europe. They are slightly larger than house flies and have golden-yellow hairs on their thorax. They fly sluggishly, making them easier to swat.

Unlike many flies whose larvae feed on dead things, cluster fly larvae feed within earthworms after adults lay eggs in soil cracks. Until fall arrives and adults begin looking for overwintering sites, these flies go unnoticed.

As with other nuisance invaders, the best management tactic is to prevent entry as previously described. Before cluster flies move indoors for overwintering, insecticide treatments can be applied to upper stories of building exteriors for control.

Once indoors, and when flies become active during sunny winter days or in spring, trap them with sticky traps or vacuum or sweep them for removal.

Brown marmorated stink bug is an invasive species we are seeing more of, especially in far eastern Nebraska. These stink bugs are brown and a little over one-half inch long. Marmorated means they have a marbled or spotted appearance.

We do have native brown stink bugs, but their underside is lime green which helps distinguish between the two.

Outdoors, adults will eat and damage fruit, vegetables and nut crops. The main issue most Nebraskans may deal with from these stink bug is fall invasion of homes. Again, they will not breed in homes or damage the structure, but they are annoying and smelly.

Sealing entry points is important. Another option with this insect is a spray of soapy water when bugs are aggregating on exterior walls. Dead bugs found indoors can be vacuumed or swept. If infestations are reoccurring, professional insecticide treatments outdoors may help.

Millipedes are dark brown, cylindrical and worm-like with numerous legs. They need moist environments to survive. Once inside the home, they usually curl up and die, becoming crunchy. Outdoors they are decomposers and feed on decaying leaves and dead plant matter. Like earthworms, they are beneficial.

Seal entry points to prevent them from entering the home where they are often found in basements. Once indoors, they can be trapped with glue boards or simply sweeping or vacuuming. If they are surviving in the home for very long, moisture and humidity levels may need to be reduced with dehumidifiers.

21 November 1 PSAs

While clean-up of dead plant parts, referred to as fall sanitation, is used to reduce overwintering plant diseases and insects, the trend is to wait until spring to clean up most perennials. It is best to remove or till under vegetables to help reduce pest issues, and if a perennial had a disease this season, then remove and destroy the stems and leaves; but whenever possible leave the tops of perennials to catch snow for increased soil moisture, trap tree leaves for a protective winter mulch, and provide nesting sites in hollow stems for pollinators. If you prefer a tidy landscape, cut plants back to 12 to 24 inches tall after a hard freeze. Because native bees emerge throughout the growing season, it is best not to cut the stems of perennials all the way to the crown even in spring. As new growth occurs, it will hide the old stems while still allow nesting native bees to emerge and do the important job of pollination.

A few times each year I'm ask why a hydrangea has never bloomed. In return, I ask what kind of a hydrangea is it, and when is it pruned. It is important to know the type of hydrangea you're buying and on what age of wood it produces flowers. Some hydrangeas, like 'Annabelle' and 'Incrediball', only bloom on current year or new growth. These can be cut all the way to the ground in late winter or early spring and blooming will be promoted. Some hydrangeas, like 'Limelight', 'Pee Gee', and oakleaf hydrangeas, only bloom on older wood. If these types of hydrangea are cut back in winter or early spring, flowering wood is removed; and while you will still have a nice shrub, there will not be any blooms. For hydrangeas that bloom on older wood, the only pruning needed is to remove dead stems, rubbing branches and spent flowers, usually in April, May or June.

As nuisance insects invade homes in search of overwintering sites, one of the newest ones we might encounter is brown marmorated stink bug. This is an invasive species we are seeing more of, especially in far eastern Nebraska. These stink bugs are about one-half inch long and brown in color. Marmorated means they have a marbled or spotted appearance. We do have native brown stink bugs, but their underside is lime green which helps distinguish between the two. The main issue most Nebraskans may deal with due to brown marmorated stink bug is fall invasion of homes. They will not breed in homes nor will they damage the structure, but they are annoying and smelly. To reduce entry, seal cracks around windows, doors, pipes, and chimneys with silicone or silicone-latex caulk. Repair holes in door and window screens. If marmorated stink bugs are found indoors, vacuum and dispose of them outside.

As the garden season wraps up, vegetable are being stored for later use. For potatoes, it is best to cure them after harvest by holding them in an area fairly high in humidity for one to two weeks at 60 to 75°F. This heals wounds and toughens skins. After curing, lower the storage temperature to about 40 to 45°F. Potatoes will keep even longer at 35 to 40°, but at these lower temperatures, potatoes tend to become sweet because starches convert to sugars. This can be corrected by holding potatoes at 70°F for a week or two before using them. Potatoes will keep for several months in a cool basement or cellar. They store best in moderately moist air, which helps prevent shriveling. Do not wash potatoes before storing them, keep them in the dark as exposure to light causes them to turn green. This green pigment contains the toxic alkaloid solanine. Green sections of potatoes should be removed before cooking.

Many cultivars of apples store well under home storage conditions for up to six months. Late maturing varieties are best suited to storage. Apples can be stored in baskets or boxes lined with plastic to help retain moisture. Always sort apples carefully and avoid bruising them. The saying "one bad apple spoils the barrel" is true because apples give off ethylene which speeds ripening. When damaged, ethylene is given off more rapidly and hastens ripening of other apples in the container. Because of their sugar content, apples can be stored at 30 to 32°F without freezing the tissue. In general, apples ripen about four times as fast at 50° as at 32°, so they should be kept as close to 32°F as possible for long- term storage. Because apples pass their odor to other produce and give off ethylene gas that speeds ripening of other crops, it is best to store apples separate from other produce when possible.