



We are all trying to make the most of these last warm fall days. While enjoying the last little bit of warm weather, tiny terrors seem to be everywhere. Find out what the little insects are up to and how you can keep them from making you crazy.

The minute pirate bug is one such insect that is out at this time of year. *Orius insidiosus*, also known as the insidious flower bug. It is a predatory insect in the order Hemiptera. This tiny oval shaped insect is 1/8 of an inch long and black with whitish markings on their wings. The pirate bug larvae and adults are very effective predators that feed on thrips, mites, aphids, small caterpillars, and insect eggs. In the summer months, crop fields and landscapes are full of pirate bugs feeding on insects, but in late summer and fall they start biting humans. It isn't their fault that they bite humans, they just mistake us for very large prey. The bite of this insect is surprisingly painful for their size. They use their sucking mouthparts to puncture and break the skin. They do not feed on blood, inject venom, or transmit disease. As with any insect, everyone reacts differently to their bites. Reactions can range from none to having the area swell up like a mosquito bite or turn into a hard red bump.

The downside to these tiny terrors is that it is not practical to control them. Mainly because a majority of the year they are beneficial predators and the people biting is later in the season and is temporary. If you are prone to being bit, there are a couple of options to try. Wearing dark clothing on warm days when the pirate bugs are active may help. Keeping covered with long sleeve and pants will also help to keep them from coming in contact with skin. Insect repellants might not be all that effective against the pirate bug, but if you are a pirate bug magnet it might be worth a try.

Another tiny terror that will soon be upon us is the hackberry psyllid. If you have a hackberry tree in your yard or neighborhood you are already well acquainted with this insect, maybe just not by its formal name. These tiny 1/10th of an inch insects are attracted to light and are small enough to pass through a window screen. Hackberry psyllids are the insects that make the nipple galls, or bumps, that are common on the underside of the hackberry leaves. The eggs of this insect are laid on the leaf. In response to the eggs, the leaf forms a gall, or bump, around the immature insect to protect it until it is mature and emerges from the gall. Once they emerge in the fall, they look for cracks or crevices to squeeze into so they can hibernate without freezing to death. Normally they overwinter under the bark of trees, but they often find their way into homes. Once inside, they often die due to the low humidity. The insects are not harmful to people, pets, or any home furnishings. They are just a nuisance pest. Once it gets cold outside their numbers will decrease and they will begin to hibernate.

Control of psyllids can also be tricky. One reason is because of the way the insect develops inside of a gall. For a majority of their life, the psyllid is encased inside of a gall and is protected from insecticide sprays applied to the foliage. Once the adults emerge in the fall it is too late to control them by spraying the trees. The trees can be sprayed in the spring to kill the newly hatched nymphs, but timing the applications can be very difficult. Egg laying happens over a several week period which could potentially mean several insecticide applications. It can also be impractical and not cost effective to spray large trees numerous times. Soil drenches of insecticides could prove to be an option for those who are extremely desperate for some relief, but is not usually recommended. Spraying in or around the home is usually not recommended because of the lengthy emergence of the adults from the galls. Unfortunately the best thing to do is keep the windows shut until the temperatures drop low enough to stop their activity. Once inside the home, the vacuum cleaner is the best weapon to suck up the intruders.

Don't let the tiny terrors ruin what is left of the nice weather. With a little help, and proper identification, you can stay sane and not become the next mistaken prey of the pirate bug.

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