



Fall brings about cooler temperatures, changing leaves, and boxelder bugs by the millions. Boxelder bugs are not exactly what you had in mind when you describe fall? Find out what you can do to help keep these pests from invading your home and take them out of the fall description.

Depending on where you grew up, the boxelder bug can have many names. Some of the more common names include maple bug, democrat bug, populist bug, and politician bug. Regardless of what you call them, they are annoying to say the least. The boxelder bug gets one of its common names from its primary host plant, the female boxelder tree. They can also be found on ash, maple, and occasionally feed on strawberries, grasses and other plants. The adults are 1/2 inch long black with red coloration under their wings. This time of the year they begin to cover the south and west sides of homes and try to make entry inside any way possible.

The cycle all begins in the spring. After emerging from overwintering sites, the adult females lay eggs onto the host plants. The bright red nymphs, immature bugs, hatch from the eggs in about 2 weeks and begin to feed on plant sap until mid-summer when they mature into adults. The adults lay eggs for a second generation of boxelder bugs. After the second generation matures, the adults seek out warm overwinter sites, to start the cycle over the following spring.

Homeowners become more familiar with these insects in the fall. When looking for overwintering sites, boxelder bugs often find their way into buildings and homes through small cracks and crevices. Once inside the home they are more of a nuisance than anything else. They do not bite, damage food or any items in the home, they don't reproduce, but they can stain curtains or walls, especially when squished.

Trying to control these insects can feel like a losing battle. While it may be tempting to remove the boxelder trees or other host plants from the landscape, but it won't control all of your problems. The adults are good flyers and can still invade homes from considerable distances from the host plants. The plants are rarely injured seriously enough to justify insecticidal control, but using an insecticide spray on the nymphs can reduce the number that reaches maturity.

The saying "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" has never been more true. Discouraging occasional invaders from entering the house is going to take a little work, but it will be worth it in the long run. Start by finding and sealing up any cracks or spaces they could enter through with silicone caulk or expanding foam. Make sure that window screens are in good repair and that doors are tight fitting. Also remove any dead plant debris from window wells or near the foundation. Take a look to see if there is a gap under doors. If there is a gap, place a piece of weather stripping under door so that there is no gap when the door is closed.

An outdoor insecticide treatment can also be used to help keep boxelder bugs out. Perimeter or foundation insecticide sprays and are good for a wide variety of pests and have residual effects to help protect the house for a few weeks or months. Read and follow the label instructions on how and where these products should be applied. Some products recommend to apply these insecticides on and about two to three feet out from the foundation around the perimeter of the home. The insecticides will help to decrease the numbers of pests that make it inside the house, but don't expect it to stop all of them.

If a few do find their way inside the home, the vacuum cleaner will be the best control technique. To keep from having to dump or change the vacuum cleaner bag after every use, place a knee high panty hose or trouser sock over the end of the hose before you put on the attachment end. This 'trap' collects the insects so they don't have to go all the way through the vacuum and helps to keep your machine from smelling like boxelder bugs every time you turn it on.

With just a little prevention and a plan in place, you can ensure that boxelder bugs stay outside where they belong and out of your description of fall.

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