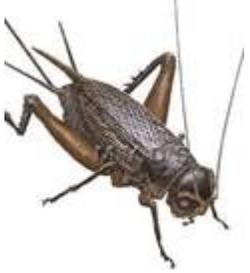


The Unwelcome Guests of Fall

Many pests (insects and rodents not in-laws) reach their maximum population levels in August or September. Their favorite place to escape the oncoming winter cold are homes. Keeping fall pests out can be a challenge, but being prepared and properly treating infestations can make fall a much more pleasant time for homeowners.



The ground invaders come in the first wave including: crickets, cockroaches, centipedes, millipedes, ground beetles, spiders and ants. These pests are attracted to the leaf litter and debris found around the foundation of houses, as well as the shade offered by surrounding landscape vegetation. From the foundation, these ground invaders will then wiggle their way into homes through any crack or crevice they can find.

Homeowners should systematically walk around their homes and look for any potential openings bugs can slip through. All cracks should be caulked and sealed. Check the seal around windows and replace any broken screens. Make sure door gaskets are firmly in place and that all other openings are sealed. Also check plumbing fixtures like water spickets for potential entryways into homes.

Homeowners can defend a ground pest problem by applying a perimeter spray. A number of insecticide products are available at garden centers and superstores, but make sure they are labeled for outside use. Spray up the house walls for 3 to 4 feet and out from the house for 3 to 5 feet. This will establish a barrier that kills bugs. Be sure to read and follow label instructions.



The second type of fall invaders enter homes in the air: house flies, cluster flies, yellow jackets, fruit flies, boxelder bugs, elm leaf beetles, oriental lady beetles, miller moths and mosquitoes. Unlike ground invaders, these airborne pests are generally not affected by foundation sprays. Because of this it is even more important to seal and caulk all cracks and openings. Many of these pests are also highly attracted to outdoor lights, such as porch lights, and enter homes when nearby doors are open. Turning off outdoor lights when they are not in use not only saves energy but helps keeps pests out of homes.

Fruit flies, however, can still get into homes because they are small enough to fit through window screens. Fruit flies may also enter homes as eggs already laid in fresh produce, or they are attracted to fruits and vegetables sitting inside. Keeping all produce in secure containers inside refrigerators and dumping compost buckets daily will help prevent homes from becoming attractive destinations for fruit flies. Fruit flies can also sometimes reproduce in organic debris in floor drains and potted plants.

If bugs do get inside a home, the first step should be, cleaning, vacuuming or sticky traps. Not only will this remove many of these unwanted guests, but it will help monitor which pests are inside. For more serious problems, indoor-use aerosol sprays are available. Sticky traps, along with the old-fashioned strategies of sucking bugs up in a vacuum cleaner or picking them up in a tissue, can usually get the job done without chemical sprays.

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