

Weather Effects on Insects

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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 degrees 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.