

Boxelder Bugs



Peggy K. Powell, Ph.D.
Extension Specialist
Entomology-Identification & Training

The boxelder bug, *Boisea trivittata*, is a common nuisance pest in and around homes. Twice a year, in the spring and in the fall, large groups of them gather in warm, sunny locations outdoors. The mere sight of a cluster of thousands on a tree trunk or the side of a house, while interesting to some people, can be quite upsetting to others. Sometimes they also become indoor pests when, at the first hint of winter, they move into houses to hibernate.

Identification

Adult boxelder bugs are 1/2-inch long flattened, oval-shaped insects. They are black in color with three narrow red lines on the segment behind the head, and red lines and a red inverted V on the wings. The immature bugs, known as nymphs, are solid bright red and smaller than the adults.

Biology and Habits

Boxelder bug adults and nymphs feed on the seeds of the female boxelder tree, actually a type of maple. They also will feed on the seeds of silver and sugar maples. Their feeding does little, if any, damage to the trees.

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Female boxelder bugs lay their eggs in the spring on the tree's bark. The eggs hatch

about the time the new leaves begin to appear. The nymphs use their needlelike sucking mouthparts to extract sap from the tender new leaves. Nymphs and adults spend the summer months on the leaves and branches of the boxelder tree.

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Normally, boxelder bugs overwinter as adults in mulch or leaf litter around trees or shrubs or in crevices in brick or stone walls. When they emerge from hibernation in the spring they often congregate in large groups on surfaces warmed by the sun. It is not unusual to see large clusters of them on tree trunks or on the siding or foundation of houses.

In the fall, even larger groups of bugs cluster in the same locations. At the first sign of cold weather, they begin looking for cracks and crevices in which to hibernate. Consequently, the bugs that have



gathered on houses often come indoors through openings around doors and windows.

Indoors, boxelder bugs are mainly nuisance pests, upsetting household occupants by their presence. However, the bugs have been known to inflict a painful bite if handled. They also have a bad odor if crushed, and they can leave stains on furnishings and draperies.

Prevention Methods and Control Strategies

Some experts recommend removing female, or seed-bearing boxelder trees to control boxelder bugs. Such a drastic control measure should be viewed as a last resort and may not

solve the problem if there are other boxelder trees in the neighborhood.

Bugs clustered on surfaces outdoors don't cause damage; control measures are not usually necessary. Caulking openings around windows

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and doors should help to keep the bugs out of the house. Use a broom and dustpan or a vacuum cleaner to remove any that do manage to make their way indoors. If necessary, use a pyrethrin spray to provide quick knockdown before removal.

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