

Fall Insect Invaders

Home-owners around the area are starting to experience the annual fall insect hibernation invasions. The three species most likely to be moving into house walls are: boxelder bugs, cluster flies, and Multi-colored Asian Lady Beetles. All three insects move onto and into homes for only one reason, survival. They hibernate in large colonies which allow them to survive the winter, as communal heat is sufficient enough for most of them to make it through on their lowered winter metabolic rate.

When the fall days reach critical day-lengths and/or critical low temperatures, these species start congregating on likely hibernation spots. Common hibernation zones include wall spaces of older homes, underneath siding or insulation of any home, and properly-sized hollow logs. They can literally show up overnight or, more properly, over the course of a day. The Multi-colored Asian Beetles are especially prone to this, where you leave in the morning and come back in the afternoon to south and west exteriors crawling with them.

On the outside of your house, they're an annoyance for a few days or a week or two, depending on the weather. When they start coming out of your walls on nice, warm days in mid-winter and flying around your tv and oven, they're an absolute nuisance. To prevent finding a few dozen per day **INSIDE** your home this winter, you need to keep them **OUTSIDE** your home now.

There is only one foolproof way to do that and it means a complete pest-proofing of your entire home. Pest-proofing means sealing your home against insect entry. It entails some detective work and usually a fair amount of actual work, but if you don't do it right, you'll still have these insects inside your home.

Things you need to do to pest-proof your home include: Caulking all spaces on the edges of your siding (tongue-and-groove siding is especially bad, as where it meets the corner boards there is a perfectly-sized entry spot). Inspecting all door and window frames for cracks into wall spaces. Placing fine-mesh screening on all vent areas. Sealing up the areas around pipe entry holes. Checking for cracks in the main foundation and where the foundation meets the rest of the structure. **AND** looking for any other possible entry points, remembering that these insects need only about a 1/8 inch hole or a 1/16 inch crack to get in.

Although pest-proofing is the **ONLY** way to deal with insect entry in the long-term (besides the fact that there are other benefits of doing this to your house), there are chemical insecticides that can be used to try to combat these problems. The key to remember when using any chemical is that they are not a cure-all and you will still have insects entering your home if you do not do a complete job, just as with pest-proofing.

If you do decide to use an insecticide in your battle with these insects, you need to use one that will work effectively at cooler temperatures, which eliminates most of the more commonly-used household insecticides. The best insecticide products to use for these situations are the synthetic pyrethroids, which will work at cooler temperatures. Specific products to look for include: Tempo, Enforcer, and Ectiban, although any product with cypermethrin, permethrin, or cyfluthrin as active ingredients will probably work.

The similarities between the three species basically end at their hibernation habits, except that all three are not found in groups except during the fall and winter. After leaving their hibernation spots, they have radically different lifestyles. Boxelder bugs are the only plant feeder of the three, as they use their long needle-like mouthparts to suck plant juices out of a variety of host species. They very rarely cause any actual plant damage, however, because they are usually solitary feeders.

The cluster flies you find buzzing in your windows will go outside and lay their eggs in the soil next spring. Their young hatch into small larvae that are parasites of earthworms throughout their development. The Multi-colored Asian Lady Beetles are the only beneficial insect of the three, as they do act like normal lady beetles during the growing season, happily munching away on local aphid populations. The average adult lady beetle eats about 10 aphids per day. So, if you have a greenhouse in your neighborhood, you might be able to sell the ones you catch during the winter?!