

# PROBLEM SOLVERS

## Michigan State University Extension

### BOXELDER BUGS, A NUISANCE PEST

#### Biology

Boxelder bugs feed on low vegetation and old seeds on the ground during the spring and early summer. When seeds begin to form in boxelder trees, the bugs move to seed-bearing, female trees.

Eggs are laid on the trunk, branches and leaves of the tree, and are found almost entirely on flowering and seed-producing boxelder trees than on male boxelder trees. Although boxelder bugs feed on these trees throughout the summer, there is not noticeable damage or effect on the trees. They may also feed on maples, ash, and even apple, plum and grapevines.

During late summer and fall, the bugs begin leaving the trees to find protected areas for the winter. Although many young insects may be present in the fall, only full-grown bugs survive the winter. These winged forms can easily fly several blocks. The insects enter houses near the foundations and push into cracks. Many get into the walls and under shingles on the walls.

During the coldest part of the winter, the insects are inactive, although during warmer days some may enter the house and become a nuisance. They do not breed in the house or cause any damage. However, they may spot curtains and fabrics if they are extremely abundant. Occasionally, some seek moisture and may be found around flowerpots, but they do not feed to any great extent on houseplants. Eggs may sometimes be laid, but the immature bugs will not survive indoors.

The first warm spring days bring the bugs out of their protected wintering places in preparation for outdoor feeding. Unless they are bothersome, particularly at doorways, there is little point in spraying at this time. The wintering, full-grown bugs must return to trees for egg laying. Those trapped in basements and houses die during the spring.

Boxelder bugs become abundant during warm or hot summers. It is not likely that they will be a serious problem every year.

#### Control

A thorough spray application of an insecticide is most effective if it is applied in late summer and fall when the bugs cluster on trees or sunny areas of houses and other buildings. Spraying in the spring gives little relief, since the insects leave buildings and scatter over a wide area.

If bugs are abundant in summer or early fall, best results are obtained by thoroughly spraying infested boxelder trees and house foundations with a power spraying using more than 100 pounds pressure. The next best sprayer is a knapsack type, used at 35-50 pounds of pressure and sprayed into the tree as high as possible.

If trees are sprayed before many adult bugs are present, better results are obtained. Adults may fly beyond reach, requiring a repeat spraying. The object, of course, is to keep as many as possible from reaching the house foundation where they can later push in and winter. This may require repeated applications as often as the bugs accumulate.

Available insecticides are not as effective on boxelder bugs as on other insects such as flies and mosquitoes. Still, a thorough application with considerable pressure gives results.

Most insecticides labeled for landscape (tree and shrub) insect control can be used for reducing a boxelder bug problem. Be sure to follow label directions! Do not use these products indoors unless directed by the label! For indoor use, be sure to use insecticides labeled for indoor application. Using the vacuum cleaner is the best method for indoor control.

Removing the seed-bearing boxelder trees on which the bugs feed may not be a practical solution to the problem, since the full-grown, winged forms fly for distances of several blocks. However, if your residence is well isolated and no other female boxelder trees are present for some distance, you will benefit by removing the trees on your property. The boxelder bug does not live on male or non-seedbearing boxelder trees.