Bugs look for winter homes — yours

Corn and soybean fields are excellent places for insects to feed, reproduce, and hide. These insects become displaced once the harvest begins and have to move to other fields or new areas. After the first frost or as temperatures drop, many of these insects will be looking for winter homes.

Fortunately, only a few insect species will consider our homes as that warm and cozy site. Often their movement is noted after the first period of extended low temperatures in the 30s, or after a fall warmup followed by cold weather. Often a large number of these insects will try to move into our homes at one time.

These insects will not damage our homes, but they are looking for a warm spot to escape the upcoming winter. In general, these creatures are harmless but their annoys factor is certainly high enough to warrant control. Homes that are near crop fields are the most vulnerable, but even city residents are not immune from their invasion.

The insects most likely to try to enter our homes are multicolored Asian lady beetles, brown-marmorated stink bugs, boxelder bugs, and western conifer seed bugs.

Multicolored Asian lady beetles were introduced into the U.S. as a biological control agent for aphids and scale insects. They are often found in soybean fields. Their numbers may be higher this year because aphid populations were increasing during the warmer fall in soybean fields and small trees and shrubs.

Multicolored Asian lady beetles resemble other lady beetles (oval to dome-shape) but are slightly larger than the native lady beetle. They may be different shades of yellow, orange, or red, with or without spots.

These beetles invade homes looking for overwintering sites. They can fly short distances including within your house. They often congregate in corners of ceilings and walls.

They can exude a foul-smelling substance that will stain fabric and material when threatened or crushed. They are not aggressive, but people have noted that their mandibles are large enough to feel a slight nip when handled, but it will not break the skin.

Brown marmorated stink bugs have been moving into Ohio for the past several years. They feed on a wide variety of plants with their piercing-sucking mouth parts, such as fruits and soybean plants.

Their numbers have been increasing in soybean fields the past several years, where they can cause serious pod and bean damage.

The shield-shaped adults are about one-half inch in length and mottled brown to gray. The exposed edges of their abdomen have dark and light banding, and the last two antennal segments have alternating broad light and dark colored bands.

Brown marmorated stink bugs have a nasty habit of entering homes and other heated structures in large numbers in the fall to overwinter, which makes them a serious nuisance pest. They do not bite or carry human diseases, but when threatened they will emit an unpleasant odor — thus the name stink bug.

Adults will not feed on wood or fabric or lay eggs in the home.

Boxelder bugs generally reside in boxelder, silver maple, and other trees during the summer months. Adults will leave the trees in the fall and travel several miles to find the ideal overwintering site. They are attracted to tall homes or structures with a large southern or western exposure.

Boxelder bugs are about a half-inch long, dark colored and have a red "V" on their backs. They generally congregate in large numbers. For the most part, boxelder bugs are polite house guests. They do not bite, and keep to themselves. However, they do smell when crushed.

Individuals who have pine trees and other conifers in their yards may have the western conifer seed bug invading their homes. This bug is three-quarters inch long and brown on top. It has flattened, leaf-like rear legs. It makes a loud buzz when flying.

Adults feed on cones and seeds and the juveniles feed on needles. Adults overwinter by moving into warm shelters. Conifer seed bugs do not damage the home. They are only looking for a warm place to get through the winter. The bugs do not bite or carry disease.

For all these invaders, the best way to keep them out is to block entry points. Seal exterior cracks and holes around windows, doors, or utility pipes with caulking.

Although they may loiter on window screens, they are too large to fit through the screens. However, the large opening created by a worn-out exterior door sweep and an open garage door allow easy passage.

Poorly attached house siding and rips in window screens also provide an invitation.

Check homes for unprotected vents, such as bathroom and kitchen vents, or unscreened attic vents. Also, while in the attic, look for openings around soffits.

Once the bugs are inside the home, the best method to manage the offending invader is the vacuum, or pick them up by hand and deposit into the trash. Swatting or otherwise smashing the invader could cause more damage than leaving them alone, since fluids inside their bodies can leave permanent stains on furniture, carpets, and walls.

In summary, these home-invading insects are not harmful and can be removed. Blocking home entry points is the best way to prevent these uninvited guests.

Additional information and images of these invaders may be found at the following web pages: https://bygl.osu.edu/index.php/node/930 and https://bygl.osu.edu/index.php/node/942

Lentz is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources for the Ohio State University Extension Service in Hancock County. He can be reached at 419-422-3851 or via email at lentz.38@osu.edu.

Lentz can be heard with Vawn Wickerham on weekdays at 6:35 a.m. on WFIN, at 5:43 a.m. on WKXA-FM, and at 5:28 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.