Protect your home from invaders

Weather and field conditions this week will allow farmers to wrap up much of the soybean harvest, leaving many fields planted with double-cropped soybeans.

Insects that were residing in these fields will be looking for new homes. As temperatures drop, many of these insects will be looking for winter locations.

Fortunately, only a few insect species will consider our homes as that warm and cozy location. Their movement is often noted after the first period of extended low temperatures in the 30s, or after a fall warmup followed by cold weather.

Once a home has been targeted as desirable, large numbers of these insects will try to move into the building 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 annoyance 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.

Now is the time for homeowners to block entry points to these insects. Window screens will prevent entry even if many insects gather on them. However, worn-out exterior door sweeps and open garages allow easy passage. Exterior holes and cracks need to be sealed with caulk.

Other insect exclusion methods include finding and sealing off entry points such as cracks around windows, doors, or utility pipes. Outside siding needs to be firmly attached and rips in window screens should be repaired to prevent entry.

All home vents need to be protected, such as bathroom and kitchen vents, or unscreened attic vents. Also, while in the attic, look for openings around soffits. Once they are inside a home, the best method to manage the offending invaders is the vacuum.

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 local soybean fields, 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. They do not bite or carry human diseases, but when threatened, they generate an unpleasant odor — thus the name stink bug. Adults will not feed on wood or fabric but lay eggs in the home.

Other invasive insects include boxelder bugs and conifer seed bugs. They originate from trees in the area rather than farm fields.

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 taller homes or structures with a large southern or western exposure.

Boxelder bugs are about half-inch long, dark colored and have a red “V” on their back. 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.

Western conifer seed bugs live in conifer trees and move from yard trees into homes. This bug is three-fourths 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 juvenile 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.

All four of these invasive insects may be found around and in homes as temperatures drop the next several weeks. Blocking home entry points is the best way to prevent these unwelcome guests. If found in the home, they are not harmful and can be removed without using pesticides.

Additional information and images of these invaders may be found at the following website: https://bygd.osu.edu/node/1189

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 Vaun Wickerham on weekdays at 6:30 a.m. on WFIN, at 5:43 a.m. on WKXA-FM, and at 5:29 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.