Don’t let insects sour spring

By EDWIN LENTZ

As temperatures increase in the spring, so will insect activity. The warmer the temperature, the greater the activity. If temperatures gradually warm up, the increased activity may not be noticed. If there is a burst a warm days, insects seem to suddenly arrive.

Warmer temperatures will bring out insects that have been inactive during the winter months. Some of these have been hibernating in our homes, such as Asian lady beetles and brown marmorated stink bugs. Others, such as termites and carpenter ants, establish new colonies.

Most of these insects do not become visibly active until daytime temperature routinely reaches 50 degrees or above. The Asian multicolored lady beetle and brown marmorated stink bug will move from their hiding places in buildings and search for a way out.

The brown marmorated stink bug may be new to many homeowners. It will not cause any damage to the home, but its size as well as the potential to stain fabric and smell when smashed make it a nuisance. It has a “shield” shaped body that is characteristic of all stink bugs.

The adults are approximately five-eighths of an inch long with a mottled brownish gray color. The underside is white, sometimes with gray or black markings, and the legs are brown with faint white banding.

Multicolored Asian lady beetles sometimes inadvertently move into living quarters during spring as they leave exterior wall voids, attics and other unheated areas within buildings. Frightened lady beetles may release a foul-smelling yellow-orange body fluid, which may stain walls and fabric.

Any brown marmorated stink bug or multicolored lady beetle found this time of year is trying to find a way out of your home this spring. One can gather them up and release them outdoors or collect them in a shop vacuum.

The multicolored lady beetle will become a voracious aphid eater outdoors. The brown marmorated stink bug has the potential to become a serious pest in backyard fruits and soybean fields.

More information on the brown marmorated stink bug may be found at https://extension.psu.edu/tree-fruit-insect-pest-brown-marmorated-stink-bug and for the multicolored lady beetle at https://ohiofile.osu.edu/factsheet/ENT-44.

Other insects that become more visible in spring are termites and carpenter ants.

These insects can actually cause structural damage to buildings. When an existing termite colony gets to a certain size, part of the group will leave to establish a new colony. This tends to happen on warm spring days after a rain.

Evidence of termites includes “pencil-sized” mud tubes constructed on the surface of foundation walls, mud protruding from cracks between boards and beams, and wood that is hollow or rotting. If you suspect damage, the first thing to do is to correctly identify the insect causing the damage.

Termites are a serious problem, but their damage is a rather slow and gradual process, so an individual has time to determine a plan of action. For termites, an exterminator will most likely be required to eliminate the pest. However, many suspected termite issues turn out to be carpenter ants.

Carpenter ants may resemble a new swarming infestation of termites, but identification may be made by looking at the wings and bodies. Both insects have two sets of wings.

Wings on a termite are all the same size; front wings on the carpenter ant are noticeably larger than the hind pair. Also, carpenter ant wing tips are pointed; termite wings tend to be paddle-shaped. Termite wings break easily from the body, but ants stay attached — detached wings indicate termites.

Body segments are the fastest way to tell the two insects apart. Ant bodies have three distinct segments; termites only have two.

Carpenter ants are the largest ant found in Ohio (generally one-quarter to one-half of an inch in length). Their size alone often leaves the homeowner feeling that they have a serious invasive pest.

However, carpenter ants generally are not destructive like termites. They do not eat the wood, but they chew through it. Carpenter ants often attack areas of moist wood, such as around water pipe areas.

Sawdust is often seen around areas damaged by carpenter ants, since they do not eat wood. Like termites, an exterminator may be required to remove the problem.

Additional information may be found on termites and carpenter ants at the following web locations: https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/eff604 and https://ohiofile.osu.edu/factsheet/HYG-2063.

All of us are looking forward to the warmer temperatures of spring, but along with these warmer temperatures there is the potential for some irritating and destructive insects.

However, by being diligent and observant these insects will only be an inconvenience rather than a destructive pest.

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