

Invasion of the Creepy Kind

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Fall can be a very enjoyable time. Kids are back in school, leaves change color, and the air temperature is cool and crisp. We get ready for winter by canning our produce, raking leaves, and decorating our homes for Halloween. Squirrels are busy hiding walnuts and other goodies. Geese make appearances as they head south. Many insects get ready for winter by looking for places to hibernate, lay eggs, or find food.

Paper wasps and yellow jackets are busy foraging to feed their hive. Early in the year they feed on caterpillars, but now they look for ripe fruit, spilled soda, or any other sweet thing they can find. Populations in the hives have outgrown their preferred food supply. While we are spending time outdoors these insects become a nuisance as they buzz around us wondering if we are something good to eat. They are not attacking; they just want to check you out. They are attracted to bright colors and sweet smells. Cut back on the perfume and cologne. Slapping them might just get you stung, and they can and will sting several times, unlike a bee which only stings once.

Last week I had a guy in my office wondering about black worms that are about an inch and a half long with many legs invading the house or garage. These critters have a habit of curling up tightly if handled. Harmless but kind of creepy, millipedes feed on decaying organic matter and find ways into the house with wet cool autumn weather. To reduce the invasion from these pests remove organic matter, leaf litter, mulch, spent plant material from around the foundation of your house, caulk and seal any openings, and thin shrubs to allow for quicker drying after irrigation or rain. Insecticides can be applied around the foundation of the house to provide a barrier. Detaching your lawn will reduce the food supply and consequently reduce millipede numbers, too.

Boxelder bugs and Asian lady beetles congregate on trees and houses looking for a place to spend winter. They often find their way into our houses and become a nuisance inside as well as outside. Squishing them leaves an odor and a sticky yellow fluid. Vacuuming or sweeping is the best way to deal with these when in the house. Use an old nylon stocking inserted into the wand of your vacuum and a rubber band to keep the stocking from being sucked in. This makes a nice critter collection bag. Dispose of the insects by taking outside and releasing. Be sure to caulk and seal any cracks and holes in your house or they will be back. Insecticides applied to siding and around doorways and windows will kill the insects as they attempt to enter the house.

Most of these creepy critters are a pest because of their habit of attacking our living spaces during the fall and usually are not much of a concern at other times. Wasps, millipedes, boxelder bugs, and Asian lady beetles work hard to find food or a warm place to spend the cold long winter.

Feel free to call on me anytime with questions about insects invading homes at 605-394-2188 or emailing me at ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu. Check out our website at <http://www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html> and click on "horticulture" in the left hand sidebar.