

Except for those that have had their homes invaded by box elder bugs, it seems now is the wrong time of year to be writing about them. Box elder bugs are a native insect that, when they are adults, feed on the seeds of box elder trees and a few other closely related species or species with similar looking seeds; mainly maple and ash. Adults emerge in the spring and lay eggs on plants where the newly hatched nymphs can feed. They have piercing sucking mouth parts and can feed on the leaves, fruit, and soft stems of many species of plants. Population levels are cyclical, but in bad years, they seem to be everywhere. In the fall they congregate on the south and west sides of buildings to warm up, and this is where they enter homes.

The reason I bring this up is that I recently spent a night at a cabin infested by box elder bugs. Every time the cabin is heated up, the bugs come out of the walls in to the interior spaces. My daughter was not very happy about this, where I vacuumed up 15 or 20 off of the floor and walls of the room she was staying in. I cleaned as many out of the room my wife and I were sleeping in. There were dead bugs in every window sill in the cabin and many other places that also needed to be cleaned up, where the cabin is not occupied all of the time. I went from having little experience with them in building to seeing it up close. The little buggers are annoying to say the least.

I wish I had an easy solution for keeping them out of buildings, but there is not one. Utah State University Extension's advice is to seal up the exterior of building with caulking where they can get in and also installing door sweeps that are just in contact with the ground. Once inside, it is impractical to use an insecticide because you cannot really spray them because they hide inside the walls. Extension suggests vacuuming them using an inexpensive shop vac with a few inches of soapy water in the base so that they quickly drown once inside the vacuum. I noticed that they are attracted to light, there may be something that could be rigged using sticky traps intended for mice near a lamp or something in rooms after the sun is down.

As far as outdoor control in the fall, spraying them when they are present on walls using a reduced risk insecticide such as insecticidal soap in the morning may be an option. For the worst situations, you may need to use a more powerful insecticide for longer term deterrence and control containing something such as permethrin. Be sure you follow the label. One thing is for sure, as long as people live or keep building near box elder bugs habitat, they will continue to be an annoying problem.