


what's buggin' ya?

AN EDUCATIONAL NEWSLETTER ON MANAGING INSECTS IN OUR ENVIRONMENT
Molly E. Keck, IPM Specialist, Texas AgriLife Extension Service – Bexar County

SPRING 2008

Spring is here and insects will start moving once the weather warms up. Read on to learn more about which insects will be popping up in the next couple of weeks. Make sure you visit the upcoming events box for information on free, educational entomology seminars.

 Molly Keck

Pest Alert: Galls Invade Trees



As oak trees drop their leaves this spring, you may notice small ball-like objects on the underside of the leaf. These are galls and are not uncommon on oak trees. Galls are abnormal growths of the plant caused by insect feeding or laying their eggs in the plant. Gall wasps usually attack oak trees and members of the rose family. A female lays her eggs in the plant and the plant forms a gall in reaction. The egg hatches and the larvae uses the gall tissue for food.



Many people think galls are unsightly, but they generally do not damage the plant. In fact, it's a defense mechanism of the plant. It would be impossible to prevent galls, because there really is not a way of knowing when the gall wasps are going to lay their eggs. In addition, the gall wasps touch the plant with the tips of their legs and ovipositor (egg laying structure), and would come into very little contact with any pesticide sprayed on the trees. It may look bad, but your trees are not being harmed.

Galls can be found on various different plants and can take on all sizes and textures. An interesting experiment to try at home is to take an intact gall and place it in a jar. If there is a wasp in there, it will eventually emerge.

Termites vs Ants

February and into spring are common swarming seasons for many ant and termite species.

Termites and ants can look very similar, and you may not know if that winged insect inside your home or under the porch light is a termite or an ant. For me, the body shape is the easiest clue. There are three ways to differentiate termites and ants: antennae, wings, and body shape.

	Ants		Termites	
Antennae	bent, kinked, elbowed		straight	
Wings	forewings longer than hind wings		4 wings same size	
Body shape	ants have a pinched waist and tend to curl (bend over) when they die		body is thick, no waist, and tend to stay straight when they die	

Once you have determined if it is a termite or an ant, the next step is determining what type it is. This will help you choose the appropriate treatment option, or if treatment is even necessary.

The following publications at <http://agrilifebookstore.org> will help you ID your termites: Drywood Termites - E 366, Formosan Subterranean Termites - E 367, Subterranean Termites - E368

To ID your ant, check out these publications: The Common Ant Genera of Texas - B 6138, Managing Household Ant Pests - B 6183, or visit <http://termite.tamu.edu> and <http://fireant.tamu.edu>, contact Molly Keck (see address box on next page).

Keep Your Ladybugs Around



Ladybugs or lady beetles can be purchased at local nurseries or online around this time of year. Releasing lady beetles can be a fun and interesting event for youth and adults.

There are tricks you should follow to make sure your lady beetles stay in your garden.

When you purchase your bag of lady beetles, don't release them right away. If you get

over-zealous, they will just take flight and leave the garden immediately. Keep the lady beetles in the refrigerator overnight or for at least a few hours. Don't use the freezer—that will kill them! The refrigerator will slow them down without killing them so that they don't fly off as soon as you release them. They may appear asleep or dead, but once they warm up, they will be fine.

The next tip to follow is to sprinkle your plants well with water before releasing the lady beetles. They will be very thirsty and if they have water to drink they will be more likely to stay in your garden and do their job.

Remember, lady beetles feed on other insects, especially aphids. If there isn't any food for them, they will go looking for food. Make sure to release your lady beetles on plants that have aphids so that they can find food easily. Don't be upset if your lady beetles don't stay around – it just may mean that there isn't enough food. If they have a food source within your landscape, you provide water for them, and slow them down, your rate of success will be much higher!



Please Join Us !

2008 Entomology Educational Seminar Series

June 12	Integrated Pest Management in the Garden
July 24	Termites 101 for Homeowners
August 7	Good Bugs, Bad Bugs
September 25	Ants in the Plants
October 23	Pantry Pests

All programs will be presented by Molly Keck.
2-4 pm

Bexar County AgriLife Extension office
3355 Cherry Ridge, Suite 212, San Antonio, TX 78230

Space is limited - Please RSVP to Sharon Hutto, by the Monday before each class, 210/467-6575.

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Unless otherwise noted, all photographs courtesy of Molly Keck & TAMU Entomology/Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Termite photo: University of Nebraska-Dept of Entomology

Insect Questions & Answers

- Q.** I see commercials stating that spring is the time to treat for termites. Are there better times of the year to treat?
- A.** No - February is just the time of year when termites swarm, and homeowners realize that have termites. You can apply termite treatments any time of the year that termites are active, however companies take advantage of this time. Extremely wet weather or frozen soil is not recommended.
- Q.** If I see ladybugs in my landscape, does that mean I have aphids?
- A.** Generally, yes. Ladybugs or lady beetles will usually only be on a plant if there is food. Several lady beetles always found on a plant would indicate that they are feeding. A single ladybug may not indicate this.

Educational programs of Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age or national origin.