

what's buggin' ya?

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

We're warming up and warming up quickly. Spring is right around the corner and this is the season for insects. Read on to learn who to look out for and what to do for prevention this Spring.

 Molly Keck

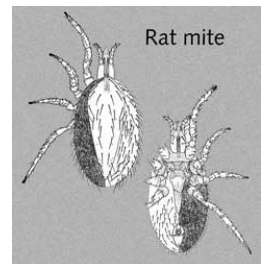
MYSTERY BUG BITES

If you are experiencing mystery bites in the home, you are not alone. Right now it seems that the Bexar County Extension office is getting more calls than usual about this subject. There are several types of insects that may bite humans, such as: mosquitoes, fleas, chiggers, lice and some types of mites. None of these will live in or under your skin or in the body.

Many have had problems with mites now that the weather has started to warm up. Mites are very small, but with good eyes, you can see them. They are only about the size of a period at the end of a sentence. The Tropical Rat Mite and Fowl Mites are the most common mites found indoors. They are found where rodents or birds are found because these are their hosts.

If you have bird nesting against the structure or in the home, you may have fowl or tropical rat mites. It is very likely that the reason for this sudden increase in mite infestations is due to the weather change. Many rodents move indoors during the colder months to nest and now that it is getting warmer, the rodents moving back outdoors to burrow. When they leave their nest, the mites no longer have their host, and bite the next best thing - YOU!

Remove all nesting materials and treat the nest area. Products that contain the active ingredient, bifenthrin, are helpful against mites. Read the directions and do not apply to beds, couches, or food handling areas unless stated on the label.



<http://citybugs.tamu.edu/FastSheets/Ent-1025.html>

It is easy to get carried away once you have identified the problem as mites. Many people will let their imagination get the best of them and even after the mites are gone, still continue to experience bites. If you no longer have raised welts, or the bite does not appear unless you scratch and pick at the skin, it's probably not mites any longer. Do not overuse pesticides, which can lead to sensitivity of the skin and will make you think you are being bitten when you are not. These mites DO NOT complete their lifecycle on humans; they are not living on you or in your skin. They only bite you when they come in contact with you. Get rid of the source (birds or rodents) to get rid of the mites.

MEXICAN HONEY WASPS: WHAT'S THAT UP MY TREE?



Mexican Honey Wasps are a strange, but very interesting wasp that is starting to pop up all around the San Antonio area. Mexican Honey Wasps are one of the few insects (other than bees) that can produce honey. These wasps form round nests, high up in trees that can reach the size of a basketball or larger. During the winter, when the leaves fall out of the tree, homeowners notice them. Fortunately, these wasps are very docile and will rarely attack, even when provoked. Mexican Honey Wasps seldom fly from the nest, and when the limb they build their nest on is shaken, will leave the nest and crowd around it.



If you have Mexican Honey Wasps, leave them alone. They are a stinging insect, and you can never predict what will trigger them to attack. If you are very concerned, call a pest control company to remove the nest. If they do not bother you, live and let live: they are pollinators and are very interesting to watch.

For more information about Mexican Honey Wasps, visit: <http://www.texasento.net/Brachygastra.htm>. All photographs used in this article can be found at that site.

ORGANIC PRODUCTS: DIATOMACEOUS EARTH



Diatomaceous Earth (DE) is a well known organic option for treating insects. DE is not actually organic because it does not contain a carbon in its chemistry, but the public perceives it to be organic, because it is low toxicity. DE acts as an irritant to insects. Insects are covered with a waxy exoskeleton that keeps moisture inside. When that waxy layer is cut, moisture will escape and they will dry up.

DE is most effective when it is powdery and dry. When it becomes wet, it gets clumpy and isn't able to act as the abrasive that cuts the insects exoskeleton. If you decide to use DE, make sure you keep it dry. Once it gets clumpy, it's ineffective. Be sure to use it during dry days and not in wet or humid areas. DE is not effective on fire ant mounds or in compost bins because these areas are very moist. DE is best used as a barrier around gardens, flower beds, or the home. Understand that it can be expensive and needs to be reapplied.

Be sure not to breathe in DE when you apply it. Wear a mask or some other protection around your mouth. Do not apply on windy days to prevent drift. DE can be found at most nurseries or stores that sell pesticides.

Insect Questions and Answers

Q. Are ladybugs also green? I'm finding green ladybugs all over my plants.

A. NO! Ladybugs are only red or orange with black spots or black with two red spots. The "green ladybugs" are cucumber beetles, a type of beetle that feeds on foliage as adults. These are considered pests, not beneficial.

Q. I'm finding cocoons all over my garden. How do I figure out what they will become?

A. Winter is the time of year when most butterflies and moths pupate. It is extremely difficult to determine what type of moth or butterfly will emerge, even for experts. To find out what your cocoon will become, place it in a large jar or container with some cotton balls soaked in water. Be sure to check regularly for mold, and within a couple months you should learn what type of butterfly or moth you have!



2009 Entomology Educational Seminar Series

Presented by Molly Keck, Integrated Pest Management Program Specialist & Entomologist for Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Bexar County

March 17 th	Termites 101 for Homeowners
April 14 th	Lawn Pest Management
April 23 rd	Integrated Pest Management
May 12 th	Organic Pest Control
June 4 th	Fire Ant Management

The above programs will be held 2-4pm at the Bexar County AgriLife Extension Office:
3355 Cherry Ridge, Suite 208
San Antonio, TX 78230

May 15-16 **Insect Collection Workshop and Field Trip**
(please call for registration information, RSVP and materials fee required)

Please give us a call to let us know you are coming!
Contact Molly or Aurelia at:
210/467-6575 or mekeck@ag.tamu.edu

We will seek to provide reasonable accommodations for our events for all persons with disabilities. We request that you contact our office at least two weeks in advance of an event to advise us of the auxiliary aid or service that you require.
Education programs of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

For More Info on Insects of Pest Management Contact:

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Entomology is blogging now! The Bexar County blog is getting started. Visit for pest of the month articles, answers for your insect questions and more! Please be patient, it is still in the beginning phases:

<http://bexarento.blogspot.com>