

# 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

*The weather feels nice and we're getting a lot of rain, which means bugs are out and causing some problems. Fall is a wonderful time for insects to roam, read to on to learn which ones will be active this time of year!*

 Molly Keck

## SNAIL, SLUGS, PILL BUGS, OH MY!

Again, lets blame it on the wet weather, but you have noticed an abundance of snail and slugs this summer and especially now that hurricane season has brought us rain. Snail, slugs, and pill bugs thrive in wet weather. These animals are not normally a problem in the garden, but when found in abundance, they can be an issue.

Snails, slugs and pill bugs can all chew on plants, leaving irregular shaped holes, not unlike caterpillar damage. The main difference is that you will *see* snails, slugs and pill bugs, whereas, caterpillars may be doing their damage in secret. In a typical home garden, it takes hundreds to do much damage, and they aren't always good at hiding. An easy trick to force them out of hiding is just to water. The saturation will make them crawl out and across the lawn or sidewalks.

Slug and snail baits are fairly effective against all three pests, but usually when we dry out they will leave on their own. Again it takes amazing numbers to do much damage, so don't overreact: if they are not feeding on your plants, no need to treat. When it does dry up, turn over your mulch or soil to allow it to dry out some and destroy their harborage.

Also, be aware that there is a beneficial snail, the decollate snail, who feed on the pest snails. Their shell resembles an ice cream cone in shape.

Another thing to note: slugs are not leaches! If you don't have a body of water nearby, you're most likely seeing slugs. Also, slugs have two antennae like appendages that they push out and in, leaches don't have this.



Sow Bugs & Pill Bugs  
Photo: B. Drees, A&M



Brown Garden Snail  
Photo: Jack Kelly Clark, UC IPM



Gray Garden Slug  
Photo: Jack Kelly Clark, UC IPM



Predaceous decollate snail  
Photo: Jack Kelly Clark, UC IPM

## MOSQUITOES AND RAIN

Yes, rainy weather will always encourage mosquitoes. Mosquitoes lay their eggs in water, and when rain leaves standing water in containers or drainage ditches, this enables the lifecycle to continue. It may seem like as soon as it rains the mosquitoes are active, and this is true. Some females are waiting for the water sources to take a blood meal to lay their eggs. Other times, pooled water in your yard is attracting adults, because they now have a place for the eggs. Also, it only takes 10-14 days for mosquitoes to go from egg to adult (the shorter time during hot weather), so while we may dry up and the rain may stop, be expecting mosquito activity to continue to increase weeks after the rain ends.

Remember the rules for mosquitoes: the 4 D's.

- 1) Drain Standing Water (where mosquitoes congregated and lay eggs)
- 2) Stay indoors during Dawn and Dusk (when most mosquitoes are active)
- 3) Dress in long pants and shirts (hide the exposed parts from mosquitoes)
- 4) Where insect repellent containing DEET or Picaridin (the only two scientifically proven to repel mosquitoes, consistently)

## THE BATTLE AGAINST FIRE ANTS

Fire ants are popping up everywhere all over town and what seemed to have gone away in the dry, hot weather has re-emerged! In fact, fire ants were always there, it's just that their mounds weren't above ground. When it rained, the ground became saturated and they moved their nest up, pushing up the soil and making a fluffy mound.

Fire ants are a pest to nearly everyone. Perhaps their only redeeming quality is that they help control ticks and fleas in the landscape, although they do not eradicate them.

If you are having a problem with fire ants and want to manage them, fall is one of the best times to treat. Baits are a good option, and will help control unseen mounds. You use a small amount of pesticide with baits, and fire ants remove it from the environment, taking it back to the nest to feed to other members of the colony. Unfortunately, you need to wait until the ground dries up some and rain is not forecasted for at least 48 hours.

There are many different types of baits available, but application is probably the single most important factor. Use when fire ants are foraging – if it's hot, apply early evening or late afternoon. If it's 80 or below, anytime is adequate. Don't let bait get wet, and broadcast evenly over the lawn. Remember not to apply more than the label recommended rate – we find in field research that more is not better, it actually has worse management results. A little goes a long way, because it's *food* for the fire ants!

For more information about fire ants, visit [eXtension.org/fire+ants](http://eXtension.org/fire+ants)



Entomology is blogging! Visit the Bexar County Entomology blog for the latest and greatest in bug news!

<http://bexarento.blogspot.com>

## Insect Questions and Answers

**Q.** I see green beetles with black spots, are they ladybugs that haven't changed colors yet?

**A.** No! Those are cucumber beetles and they are foliage feeders. You want ladybugs around, but definitely not cucumber beetles. Chase them away if you see small, bb sized holes in your leaves.

**Q.** I'm seeing long, skinny bugs with lots of legs that roll up when you touch them. What are they?

**A.** They sound like millipedes. Millipedes are common during times of saturating, constant rain. They are usually not a problem, feeding on decaying organic matter in the soil, but when it rains too much, they will start to feel on the organic matter on your live plants and chew through the leaf, leaving little holes. It takes nearly hundreds upon hundreds to do much damage, though.

**Q.** I have way too many insects coming to my porch lights at night to enjoy the nice weather. How I can prevent this?

**A.** Insects are attracted to various wavelengths of light, but some wavelengths can't really be seen by insects. If you have too many insects, change your porch lights to a yellow light. The compact fluorescent

For More Info on Insects of Pest Management Contact:

**Molly Keck**

Integrated Pest Management Program Specialist

3355 Cherry Ridge, Suite 212

San Antonio, TX 78230

210-467-6575

[mekeck@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:mekeck@ag.tamu.edu)

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