Spring is here, spring is here! And I didn’t need a groundhog to tell me. There are plenty more insect and plant future tellers in our area that do a much better job.

Molly Keck

COMMON INDOOR COCKROACHES

I may be a little more sensitive to this than most, but finding a cockroach crawling across a restaurant floor can send chills down my spine and a pain in my stomach. Not all cockroaches are considered equal, and most people confuse what I consider the “worse” cockroaches for the “better.”

In the San Antonio area, the most common cockroaches in the kitchens of homes and restaurants are American Cockroaches and German Cockroaches. American cockroaches are often called palmetto bugs or water bugs by people in other states, or those who are too embarrassed to say cockroach.

American cockroaches are larger (1½ to 2in) and can fly. They live outdoors and come indoors when the weather is just so and there is a food source indoors. They can make their way in through separations in the pipes and concrete, cracks a minimum width of a quarter and through weep holes. Structures with a large amount of ground cover close to the building tend to have more problems with American cockroaches. American cockroaches will infest indoors if there is enough food for them. They often move indoors during high humidity, when water is scarce, after a good rain washes their outdoor “home” away, or if pet food is kept out regularly.

German cockroaches are much smaller (1/2 in), light brown to tan, with two black stripes close to their head (on the pronotum). German cockroaches are truly urban pests, never living outdoors and adapted for live indoors with humans.

German cockroaches get into the home via transfer from an item that is infested with them or has an egg sack stowed away in the item. They can reproduce very quickly, and their numbers increase exponentially.

Like all cockroaches, German and American cockroaches are nocturnal, but they will wander around if their hiding places are disturbed during the day. If you see multiple German cockroaches out during the day, you know you have a real issue.

Cockroaches can be mechanical vectors of disease carrying agents, such as bacteria. They crawl across a surface with a bacteria growing, and then crawl across your food, transferring the bacteria. German cockroaches, especially, are known causes of indoor asthma triggers.

Management of any cockroach begins with good sanitation. Removing food and water sources, and hiding places (clutter, debris). Inspect by using glue boards or looking for droppings or egg cases. Use baits where cockroaches are known to hide. If using baits, avoid using sprays at the same time to prevent bait contamination. The larger the population, the more bait stations you will need.

In the case of American cockroaches, close up cracks and crevices and foam points where pipes enter. They come in from outside, so you must seal up that entry point. For this reason alone, I prefer to deal with American cockroaches.

*Photos by Bart Drees – insects.tamu.edu/fieldguide
MOUNTAIN LAUREL CATERPILLARS

As the Mountain Laurel’s start to bloom, you will probably notice little caterpillars feeding on the new growth and often forming loose webbing. These are called Genista caterpillars and are common pests of Mountain Laurels. Genista-caterpillars generally do not harm the plant, they have been coexisting for a very long time, and unless the tree is completely defoliated, do not expect the tree to be harmed. If you feel treatment is necessary, spray with a product labeled for caterpillars such as Bt or Spinosad. Be sure to spray under the leaves where caterpillars spend most of their time feeding.

For more information on Genista caterpillars visit: landscapeipm.tamu.edu.

Another common Mountain Laurel pest are tiny red immature Hemipterans. They are more common on the buds than the leaves, and gather together in clusters. Although I’m not positive on the species because they are immature when found, they are very closely related to boxelder bugs or largus bugs. If they cause you concern, take a glass of soapy water outside, flick the plant and let them drop into the glass. The soapy water will kill them even if they manage to crawl out. Again, these will not cause damage to the tree either.

TEXAS SPRING PREDICTORS: CRANE FLIES

If you have spent any time outdoors in the past month, you have seen Crane flies. Crane flies are a fly, not a giant mosquito and not a hunter of mosquitoes. They just resemble them slightly. Crane flies are very benign insects that do not bite or infest homes. In fact, as adults, they most likely don’t eat and probably don’t even have functioning mouthparts.

Crane flies are a good indication that spring is here. Just like red buds and mountain laurels starting to bloom, crane flies come out when the weather gets a little warmer and we stop expecting freezes.

Crane flies may be a nuisance, but they will not hurt you. They will also not infest your home. They are attracted to lights, so if they irritate you, keep porch lights off and close your blinds. This may prevent them from flying indoors. Don’t bother spraying or using pesticides, they don’t live long enough and there will be another wave the next day. Give them another couple weeks and they should disappear as quickly as they arrived.

Upcoming Insect Programs/Seminars

“30 Bugs Every Gardener Should Know”
April 3rd, 2-4pm
Bexar Co. Extension Office: 3355 Cherry Ridge, Ste 212
Cost is $10

“Bed Bug Awareness 101”
May 29th, 2-4pm
Bexar Co. Extension Office: 3355 Cherry Ridge, Ste 212
Cost is $10

“Youth Bug Camp”
July 16-19 OR July 23-26
9am-1pm
$100 for new campers, $50 for returners not needing kits

Questions? Need to RSVP or register?
Contact Molly at 210-467-6575 / 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.