

what's buggin' ya?

AN EDUCATIONAL NEWSLETTER ON MANAGING INSECTS IN OUR ENVIRONMENT
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Spring has sprung! Crickets are chirping, butterflies are flying and bees are buzzing! If our warm and dry weather persists, we can be assured to see the heat loving pests early this year. Read on to learn what bugs may be bugging you this spring.



Molly Keck

MEXICAN HONEY WASPS MAKE THEIR PRESENCE KNOWN

I have included an article on these interesting wasps in my newsletters before, but this spring they seem to be especially abundant and the media recently did some stories on them with some major misinformation.

Mexican Honey Wasps are little wasps, more like the size of a house fly. They are mainly black with some yellow stripes on their abdomen, and you probably wouldn't recognize one if it flew into your garden. What you do notice is the nest they build up in trees. Usually the nest is build high enough that it goes unnoticed and undisturbed. But, every now and then, they'll build one four feet from the ground in a shrub or short tree.

Mexican Honey Wasp nests are constructed of cellulose material, and up close look like paper. Inside the nest, these wasps actually produce honey – one of the few insects that do other than honey bees. When left alone, the wasps will leave humans and animals alone. If you throw rocks at the nest, douse it with water, or something else disruptive, they will defend their nest and they do have stingers like any wasp.

By and large, I recommend that people leave the nests alone. Control is rarely needed unless the nest is hanging over a school playground or low enough to the ground that people will pass it readily.

These wasps are beneficial. They are great pollinators and predators of such insects as the Asian psyllid that vectors of the pathogen that causes Citrus Greening – a detrimental disease to the citrus industry.

These wasps are native to Mexico and South America and have been found in Texas (especially south Texas) for many years. However, they do seem to be more abundant as each year passes. Don't be surprised if you look up one day when the leaves have dropped from your tree to find a basketball or larger hanging between the branches.



CRICKETS CAN TELL THE TEMPERATURE

Yes, crickets can actually tell you what temperature it is outdoors. Crickets chirp by rubbing their legs together and the number of chirps they do so at a rate that is pretty consistent with the outdoor temperature. So, if those crickets are keeping you up at night, here's something you can do other than counting sheep – count cricket chirps!

The easiest way to determine the temperature by crickets is to count the number of chirps produced in 15 seconds and add 40. This will give you the approximate temperature in Fahrenheit, plus or minus a few degrees. For a more accurate temperature, use this formula:

$$T = 50 + (N - 40/4)$$

T = Temperature

N = number of chirps per minute

Who new crickets could be useful for something? Now, if you are ever lost in the wilderness or camping, you can at least determine the temperature outside!

MOSQUITO REPELLENTS

It's already mosquito time, even though it seems like we've just come out of the cold weather. They are there, and in actuality, it never really got cold enough for the house mosquito to go into a "hibernation" type state. So, as soon as we have a warm day, they start moving around again.

I often get questions about mosquito repellents and we are always on the look for something that is "safer" to use on our bodies. The Environmental Protection Agency is the agency that approves repellents to be used and marketed to the public. The EPA has a calculator in which you can choose the time you would like repellency and you will be given a list of products that are approved for repellency for that length of time: <http://cfpub.epa.gov/oppref/insect/>.

On EPA's list of approved repellents the two that have shown to be the most effective (through research) for the longest periods of time and for the most mosquito species are DEET and Picaradin. Citronella and Catnip Oil are listed but in my literature searches all research on them showed them to have very little repellency. A newer repellent from the oil of wild tomatoes (not the tomatoes in your garden!), 2-undecanone has shown to be effective in research trials. This is labeled as BIO-UD on the shelves. IR3535 is a repellent found in Avon Bug Guard that is approved by the EPA but also has some mixed results in literature. Remember, this is not Avon Skin So Soft Lotion or Oil, those products are not approved by the EPA as a repellent.

The Center of Disease Control also has their list of EPA approved recommendations. Since West Nile is endemic to our area, it is important to use mosquito repellents not only for comfort reasons, but as a way to prevent mosquito vector-borne diseases. The current CDC list includes DEET, Picaradin and Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus.

Many people prefer not to use DEET due to the smell or common misconceptions that DEET is harmful. In actuality, I was not able to find any documented cases of DEET causing any medical issues since its 1954 introduction. However, if you are still of the camp that prefer not to use DEET, it is good to know that there are other options. But here are some tips for mosquito repellency:

- Check the EPA's website for length of time the product will repel mosquitoes and reapply often
- Take into consideration that sweating and swimming will remove the repellent
- Not all people are the same, and some attract mosquitoes no matter what repellent you use
- Not all repellents are created equal – some are more effective against certain species of mosquitoes, so you may be repelling one species, but being bitten by another. Take home message – don't blame the repellent, blame the mosquito!

30 BUGS EVERY GARDENER SHOULD KNOW!

If you are interested in learning more about what bugs may be out and about this spring, I am hosting an educational seminar called "30 Bugs Every Gardener Should Know". This will be held April 16th from 2-4pm at the Texas A&M Extension Office, 3355 Cherry Ridge, Suite 208. The cost for this program is \$10.

I will cover the 30 Bugs that will likely be making their presence known this spring and summer. I will have actual specimens and pictures. We'll cover who's good, who's bad, and who you can leave be.

Space is limited, so please RSVP to me (Molly) at meckeck@ag.tamu.edu.



Now Accepting Registrations for: BUG CAMPS!

Bug Camp – ages 7 and up

Camp 1 – July 15-18

Camp 2 – July 22-25

Tots Science Camp – ages 2-5

June 28th – 10-noon

For more information and registration forms, visit:
<http://bexar-tx.tamu.edu/entomology-youth-programs/>

For More Info on Insects of Pest Management

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