

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

With winter comes cooler weather and pests moving indoors for warmth. In addition, we are still experiencing a drought in South Central Texas, so be on the look out for strange movement inside! Happy Holidays!

 Molly Keck

COCKROACHES IN MY COMPOST ???



Photo by Bart Drees

Many gardeners who maintain a compost pile or bin will, on occasion, find cockroaches in their compost. While cockroaches aren't often thought of as beneficial insects, they do have an important role in our

ecosystem. They are recyclers, and help break down or eat the trash that we throw out. Without them and other recyclers, we would be up to our ears in trash. Cockroaches in your compost bin are doing just that – helping break down your trash into the usable compost form you like!

They may not be welcome in the compost bin, but there is no reason to get rid of them. They are actually acting as a beneficial insect in this case. During the winter, you may see an increase in cockroaches in the compost bin because it is getting colder and your compost bin is nice and warm.

Most cockroaches found in compost are not going to enter your home unless you make it easy. Make sure your compost pile is not up against the house and remove other debris (lumber, firewood, etc.) from up against the side of the house. Replace weather stripping that allows daylight through and caulk and seal up cracks and crevices. Cockroaches need less than a ¼ of an inch to squeeze indoors.

I would not recommend treating your compost bin with anything – organic or otherwise. You run the risk of killing other, extremely beneficial recyclers, and your organic breakdown can come to a screeching halt. Just ignore them and be brave – cockroaches are not your enemy in the compost bin!

The two most common roaches found in compost bins are American and (what most people call) Wood Cockroaches. Both are outdoor dwellers, but American cockroaches (commonly called waterbugs) will move indoors if they are given the chance.

ROACHES, RATS, MICE...OH MY!



With cooler weather outdoors and warmth indoors, unwanted house guests start to invade homes.

During the winter, the most common pests are rodents and roaches. But, these are easy problems to fix before they start!

Start by sealing up all tiny holes and cracks. Rodents can squeeze through a hole at least ¼ inch in diameter! Anywhere you can see sunlight shining in from outside is big enough to allow mice to enter. If it only takes ¼ inch for rodents, imagine how tiny the hole can be for smaller pests!

Outdoors, use steel wool to fill weep holes in brick homes. This will keep the large insects and rodents out, but still allow for continued airflow.

Make sure all tree limbs are trimmed away from the roof. This is most common entry for roof rats. Outdoors, remove debris, fire wood piles, trash piles, etc. from near the home. If you have to keep it – move it to the furthest corner in the yard. These are nesting places for both rodents and roaches.

If you are unlucky enough to get rodents indoors, start control soon. Rodent baits are not a preferred control measure. Other animals can eat the bait and rats that die from the bait usually die indoors leading to a stench and fly problem. Sticky traps or snap traps are a better option.

Roaches that make it indoors can be treated with roach baits. As long as there is no other food out for them to feed on, they will eat the bait. For barrier like protection, use an outdoor insecticide around the perimeter of the home. Roaches also love compost piles. If you have a compost pile make sure it is not close to the house. (See previous article.)

For more information on cockroaches check out this article at the Texas AgriLife Extension bookstore:
<http://agrilifebookstore.org> -- Cockroaches... Recognition and Control. E-359

ORGANIC PRODUCTS: BORIC ACID

Boric acid is a pesticide considered by many to be organic. In truth, you will find it categorized as inorganic, because of its chemical make-up. Boric acid does not contain a carbon, leading to the chemical category of 'inorganic.' However, it is a low toxicity pesticide, and therefore many call it 'organic.'

Boric acid is used for many different indoor pests. It can be effective against ants, silverfish, and cockroaches. Boric acid disrupts the water balance of the insect but its actual mode of action is unknown. It is believed to be a stomach poison, and may disrupt digestion, causing the insect to starve. When placed out in cracks and crevices, insect pick it up on their body and ingest it during grooming. For better results, try making a bait out of boric acid. For ants, mix with peanut butter and brown sugar or corn syrup (you may have to experiment - different ants like different baits). Cockroaches seem to be attracted to powdered sugar mixed with boric acid. For silverfish, crush egg noodles into a powder and mix with boric acid. Be sure not to use more than one teaspoon per ½ cup of attractant to prevent the insects from detecting the pesticide.

As with any pesticide, there are safety precautions to take. Just because a product is considered 'organic' or has low toxicity, it is still a pesticide! In humans, and when ingested in high doses, boric acid can harm the stomach and intestines. It can also irritate the respiratory tract and skin, so be sure to wear gloves and a mask to prevent inhaling the powder.



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!

For More Information Contact:

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2009 Entomology Educational Seminar Series

January 6th February 16th March 17th April 14th April 23rd	Pantry Pests Insect CSI: Forensic Entomology*** Termites 101 for Homeowners Lawn Pest Management Integrated Pest Management
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Presented by Molly Keck, Integrated Pest Management Program Specialist & Entomologist for Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Bexar County

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

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

*** For adult and teen audiences only! This program will be held 10am-12pm. RSVPs required.

We will seek to provide reasonable accommodations for our events for all persons with disabilities. We request that you contact our office at least 140 days in advance of an event to advise us of the auxiliary aid or service that you require.

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

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>