

### Home Invaders

Winter is a peaceful time of year. Snow makes everything clean and quiet, gardening chores are mostly done until spring, you spend more time with family and friends, and bugs have invaded your home. Okay, perhaps that last item isn't so 'peaceful', but it is a fact of life. When the weather turns cold and damp, many bugs will head for a dry, warm habitat and your home suits their needs.

Some people are very uncomfortable living with any kind of bug. However, it should help to know which ones are harmful and which ones are just a nuisance. Below is a discussion of some of the most common bugs found in the home. The term 'insect' is not used here because none of these are in the insect family. They are sometimes called *dooryard pests* because they normally live outdoors but sometimes enter buildings.

**Sowbugs and Pillbugs** are 3/4 inch long oval bugs of a grayish color. They are similar to each other except that pillbugs will roll up into a ball when touched. Pillbugs are often called roly-polys for this reason. Both of these bugs live in damp places and are often found under boards, leaves, or in a compost pile. They are attracted to damp areas in the home such as basements, crawl spaces, or interior plant-growing areas. They will not bite and do no damage to the home or household contents; however, their excrement spots on light-colored flooring are very noticeable. Their life cycle is fairly short and you will mostly find them lying around dead.

**Centipedes and Millipedes** are worm-shaped bugs up to 2 inches long of various colors. They are distinguishable from earthworms since they have many legs. They generally inhabit soil and organic matter. These creatures are also attracted to damp areas. Centipedes feed on insects and are therefore considered beneficial. Centipedes can bite but in general this is not a problem. They do no damage to the home or household contents.

**Weevils** are beetles that range from the very tiny (.14 inch long) to about 1/2 inch long. Some of the larger weevils that may wander into your home during the fall and winter are those that have been living on your outdoor plants. These include the black vine weevil and strawberry root weevil. Although they do serious damage to plants such as rhododendrons, they do no damage to the home or household contents. The most common weevils to enter your home are the very tiny gray or tan grass weevils. They gather on the sides of the house and can enter in large numbers. They are more of a problem in homes next to a pasture or grassy lot.

**Spiders** come in all sizes and are loved by very few people. Most spiders will bite if handled but only a few (black widow and hobo) are dangerous. Before handling any spider, know which kind you are dealing with. Other than leaving behind webs, spiders do no damage in the home.

**Box Elder Bugs** are about 1/2 inch long and 1/3 as wide. They are black with 3 red lines on the thorax, a red line along each side and on each wing. Box elder bugs, looking for a protected area to overwinter, can invade a home in large numbers when the weather turns cold. On warm days during the winter they will come out of their hiding place and fly around the house. They do no feeding damage but their excrement spots on fabric, such as

draperies, can be hard to remove. Box elder bugs will also be prevalent on outside walls facing south or west or on walls near box elder, maple, or ash trees.

There are no solutions to completely deal with these dooryard pests. It is helpful to remove their hiding places close to the house and to seal their entry points. Pull mulch and piles of debris away from the foundation. Properly ventilate basements and crawl spaces. Repair cracks in walls and the foundation around entry points such as doors and windows. Apply weather stripping to further seal these entry points.

Perhaps the best tool to use against those who do enter the home is a vacuum cleaner. Remember to discard the vacuum bag before they crawl out again.

## References

Washington State University Cooperative Extension. *Dooryard Pests*. EB 1199, 1991.

Washington State University Cooperative Extension. [Common Insects & Mites: Sowbugs, pillbugs, and millipedes](#). March 2002.

[Box Elder Bug](#). Washington State University Tree Fruit Research & Extension Center, Orchard Pest Management Online.