

Invasion of the Western Box-elder Bugs

Fall is definitely in the air. The days are getting shorter. The nights are getting crisp and cool. Man, beast and bug turns to getting comfortable and snug inside shelter, away from that crisp cool air.

Western Box-elder bugs are no exception. All summer they have been content to be outside quietly and unobtrusively using their long beaks for piercing the leaves on trees and plants to suck sap. And now they have suddenly gone wild and gotten in the house. Your house is crawling with bugs. They're in small cracks and crevices in walls. They're on doors and window casings. They're in the attic, around the foundation and they cover the sunny outside walls of the house. What's a homeowner to do? What kind of damage are they capable of? Why are they crawling and flying about the house?

Leptocoris rubrolineatus Barber, the Western box-elder bug belongs to a family of scentless plant bugs. It belongs to the order Hemiptera, meaning half-winged. They are native to Washington where they can be found feeding mostly on box elder and silver maple trees. The adult is a handsome slim one half inch long bug. The bug has a red body with black head, antennae and legs. The wings have red lines on a black or gray background.

In the spring, the adults lay eggs and approximately two weeks later the red and gray nymphs emerge. The nymphs develop wings and become adults by the end of summer. In the fall all the new adults gather on trees, plants and sometimes on and in your house. While they were basking on your walls in the sun, it has suddenly gotten cool and dark. The box-elder bug immediately crawls in to the nearest crack seeking warmth. Having no sense of direction, they are now lost and end up inside the house.

While the box-elder bug can be a destructive orchard pest, it is only a nuisance in residences. There is nothing it wants to eat in your house. While they are capable of biting, they really don't have a taste for people. They aren't poisonous, are not interested in your houseplants, your friends, pets, or family. They are clean bugs, do not carry disease, will not reproduce inside your house, and only stink when squashed. But, as with all living organisms, what goes in comes out. When a box-elder bug poops on your draperies and walls, the spots of excrement can be difficult to remove.

To reclaim your house and establish ownership, get out your vacuum. Turn it on and vacuum those box-elder bugs right up. You really want to do this with a vacuum that has a bag because those dead bugs are going to stink. Besides stinking when squashed, the red stripe stains whatever it touches. Keep your sense of humor. Nothing can predict when this is going to happen to you. Nothing you can do will keep it from happening. Think of it as a bad joke played on you by Mother Nature. You will have great tales to tell your friends and neighbors about the great box-elder invasion.

Resources

[Western Box-elder Bug](#). Retrieved 5/20/04 from insects.org.

EB1154 [Western Boxelder Bug](#), Washington State University, 1996.