



Kimberly Schofield
Program Specialist-Urban IPM
k-schofield@tamu.edu

Buzzing Boxelder Bug Alert

As cooler weather nears, one insect that begins to seek an overwintering shelter indoors are boxelder bugs. These bugs tend to cluster in large numbers on the sides of trees and structures, so they can easily enter structures by flying through windows, open doors or vent openings. Once they invade structures, they only live a few days and do not reproduce. However, their feces can stain curtains, paper and other home furnishings. Also their mouthparts can penetrate human skin, so beware when handling and disposing of them.

Adult boxelder bugs are ½ inches in length, brownish-black in color with three lengthwise red stripes near their heads. Their wings are thick and leathery at the base and membranous at the tip, making them a true bug. Their abdomen is red, which can be seen under the wings. The immature boxelder bugs resemble the adults in shape, except they are smaller, wingless and bright red.

Boxelder trees are sometimes used in landscapes, since they grow quickly, reaching heights of 30 to 50 feet. However, they are prone to attack by boxelder bugs, which primarily feed on the seed-bearing boxelder trees (female trees) by sucking sap from the leaves, twigs and developing seeds. However, boxelder bugs can feed on other trees such as ash, maple, plum, and apple, causing scarring of fruits.

During the fall months, adults and immature boxelder bugs congregate usually on the female boxelder trees and then begin migrating to a place to overwinter. Only adults overwinter and then emerge in the spring. After a few weeks, they begin mating and the females will deposit eggs in the cracks and crevices of tree bark. After a couple of weeks, the eggs hatch and the nymphs develop into adults during the summer. There may be two or more generations per year in Texas.

Some Options for Control:

Some Non-Chemical Control Options:

- 1) Eliminate hiding places such as piles of boards, rocks, leaves, grass and other debris close to structures.
- 2) Caulk and close openings where boxelder bugs can enter structures, such as around light fixtures, doors and windows, unscreened vents, utility pipes and air conditioners.
- 3) Screen all windows, doors, crawl spaces, roof vents, since they are attracted to light and can fly in through doors and windows.
- 4) Use a vacuum cleaner or broom to collect the bugs for easy removal.
- 5) Remove female boxelder trees from the landscape to decrease this insect's population.

Some Chemical Control Options:

If you do not wish to remove female boxelder trees, then the exposed immature boxelder bugs can be chemically treated in the spring and early summer. Some treatments include insecticidal soap and as well as products containing acephate, permethrin, and cyfluthrin. For tall trees or large areas, specialized equipment may be required. Also cracks, crevices or possible entry point/hiding places where the boxelder bugs could enter should be treated. A dust or aerosol spray can be used to give temporary control indoors.

Remember that boxelder bugs do not live more than a few days indoors, do not breed inside, and are essentially harmless.



Boxelder Bug, *Boisea trivittata* (Say)(Hemiptera: Rhopalidae) adult. Picture by Texas A&M University.



Boxelder Bug, *Boisea trivittata* (Say)(Hemiptera: Rhopalidae) nymph. Picture by Texas A&M University.

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