

Fall Insect Invasion Starting Already

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Even though we still have a month of summer left, I've seen signs that the fall invasion of insects has already begun. Callers are complaining about various creepy crawlies in their garages and basements, as well as huge spiders lurking about their doors.

All creatures instinctively know that they have to find a place to spend the winter. While decreasing temperatures may be one trigger, it's the shortening of the days that is mostly responsible for insect movement toward shelter.

There are several things that homeowners can do to reduce the invasion of insect and rodent pests. First, we need to stop attracting insects to our homes in the first place. At night, our homes are brightly lit, which attracts moths, crickets, and other nighttime insects. Curtains that block the light help. You can also switch out your outdoor lights to "bug lights," which are yellow in color (for some reason, this is not as attractive to the insects). If the moths aren't attracted to your home, then the spiders will go elsewhere to look for food.

Millipedes, centipedes, and sow bugs (roly-polies) like moist environments. You might try reducing irrigation right up against the house. Pull mulch away from the base of the house as well. Redirect downspouts, so rain water is not being kept near the house.

Next, we need to deny these critters entrance. Install door sweeps or thresholds at the base of all exterior entry doors. While lying on the floor, check for light filtering under doors. Gaps of 1/16 inch or less will permit entry of insects and spiders; 1/4 inch-wide gaps (the diameter of a pencil) are large enough for entry of mice; 1/2 inch gaps are adequate for rats. Pay particular attention to the bottom corners as this is often where rodents and insects enter.

Apply caulk along bottom outside edge and sides of door thresholds to exclude ants and other small insects. Garage doors should be fitted with a bottom seal constructed of rubber (vinyl seals poorly in cold weather). Gaps under sliding glass doors can be sealed by lining the bottom track with 1/2 to 3/4 inch-wide foam weather-stripping.

Seal utility openings where pipes and wires enter the foundation and siding, such as around outdoor faucets, receptacles, gas meters, clothes dryer vents, and telephone/cable TV wires. Holes can be plugged with caulk, cement, urethane

expandable foam, steel wool, or other suitable sealant. Also, caulk the cracks around windows, doors, fascia boards, etc.

If insects are still finding their way in, you might want to consider an outdoor insecticide treatment. Use one of the longer-lasting liquid formulations containing synthetic pyrethroids (Spectracide Triazicide, Ortho Home Defense, or Bayer Advanced Multi-Insect Killer). Apply around the outside perimeter of the foundation in a 2 to 6-foot-wide band along the ground, and 2 to 3 feet up the foundation wall.

For more information on fall insect control, please contact the Purdue Extension Service at 812-435-5287.