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SEPT/OCTOBER 2014

Pest Patrol News

Fall Invaders Coming!

In the fall a wide variety of pests begin invading homes because of environmental cues such as shorter and cooler days, plus less food available outside. They start by seeking shelter in cracks and crevices, then gradually follow these openings deeper inside until they often pop out right into our living and storage areas.

Although a few of these pests may become immediately noticeable; many lie quiet until awakened by a warmer period from fall to early spring. Responding partly to interior lights (which they mistake for a bright spring day), the pests continue crawling deeper inside. Some of the newer pests that do this include **stink bugs, Asian lady beetles,** and **western conifer seed bugs** that are all spreading to new areas. Others that continue to be serious fall invaders include **cluster flies** and **face flies, boxelder bugs, elm leaf beetles, root weevils** and **clover mites.**

Some pests invade year-round, but much more so in the fall. These include **rats, mice, crickets, earwigs, ants, millipedes, paper wasps,** and many **spiders.** Sac spiders are fall invaders that can deliver a painful bite. (The pain feels like a bee sting, and lasts for 1-2 hours.) **Wild animals** such as raccoons and squirrels also try to break into crawl spaces, basements, and attics to find a more protected place to spend the winter.

This is a busy time of the year for these invading pests, and it is important that we stay ahead of them to prevent serious pest problems. Our professional pest management services are especially important to protect you, your home and your belongings from pests that can cause damage or are health risks.

Pest Prevention Tip of the Month

Don't inadvertently bring pests indoors! Check furniture, food, grocery bags, boxes, luggage, and other items you carry in. Also check all potted plants you bring indoors for ant colonies nesting in the soil, pests like sowbugs and earwigs underneath the pots, and pests on leaves and stems.

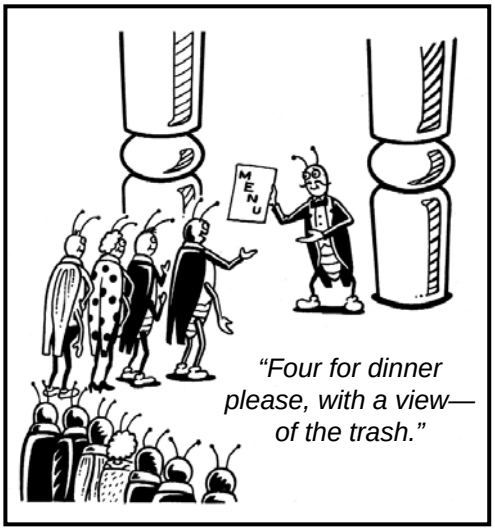
Rat & Mouse Myths

Rats and mice are only a problem in dirty, unsanitary homes. FALSE. Unfortunately, even the cleanest homes and offices experience rodent problems. These pests are very adept at finding food, and living on little or no water. However, reducing available food, water, and shelter is important in ongoing control of these common pests.

Rats and mice have excellent eyesight. FALSE They actually have poor vision beyond three feet, but they really don't need to see further. They are sensitive to motion up to 50 feet, and their sense of smell and hearing are both far superior to ours. They can even locate objects to within a few inches just by sound.

Those electronic gizmos *(ultrasonics and related devices)* **effectively get rid of rodents.** FALSE. We wish they worked, but those devices you plug into a wall outlet don't kill rodents, so the pests are unfortunately still around. University tests also find that the devices either don't repel rodents at all, or that their repellency is weak, very temporary, and ineffective. They are a waste of money for consumers for both rodents and insects.

Rats spread diseases, but at least they don't bite. FALSE. Rats do bite—mostly sleeping persons, and especially infants. Most bites occur on fingers and limbs, and some bites occur on faces. It is believed that the rodents are attracted to food residues or odors on a person's hands, fingers, or mouth. In some cases a disease, rat bite fever, results from these bites.



"Four for dinner please, with a view— of the trash."

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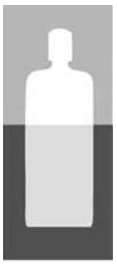
Nit-Picking Notes



Head lice lay their eggs, called nits, directly on strands of hair, using a glue that is extremely strong. In fact, the glue is so strong that it is commonly said that the lice "cement" their eggs in place.

Removing the eggs, or even the empty eggshells, from hair is difficult. There are a number of nit-removal products you can buy that loosen the glue. A study published this year in the *Journal of Medical Entomology* compared these nit-removal products with ordinary hair conditioners. Surprisingly, hair conditioners are just as effective in removing louse eggs as special nit-removal products.

You still usually need to use a product to kill the lice themselves, but since these products are not that effective in killing eggs, daily use of shampoo and hair conditioner, then combing with a *fine-toothed comb,* plays an important part in eliminating these pests.

New Mosquito-Borne Virus

Chikungunya is a mosquito-transmitted virus that has the potential to become a nasty disease in the U.S. It is already near us—it has been spreading recently in the Caribbean and Central and South America. Since 2006 there have been an average of 28 annual reported cases of the disease in the U.S., but all the cases were travelers who caught the disease outside the country and returned home infected—until recently. In July in Florida, we had the first record of a person being sick from Chikungunya who had not traveled outside the country. No one knows how quickly the disease may spread here.

Chikungunya is rarely fatal, but it typically results in fever, joint pain and muscle aches. The symptoms typically go away after a week, but in some cases the joint pain is severe and can go on much longer. There is no vaccine and no specific treatment for the infection.

This disease is another important reason to reduce your exposure to mosquitoes. This can be done through a combination of controlling adult mosquitoes, eliminating standing water where mosquitoes breed, using door and window screens, applying insect repellents when you are outside, and when possible wearing long pants and long-sleeve shirts to reduce bites.

Insect Causes Jet Crash

When a Boeing 757 crashed in the ocean less than five minutes after takeoff in 1996, it tragically killed all 189 people on board Birgenair Flight 301. The black box revealed that the instrument panel had told the very experienced captain they were going too fast, so he slowed down too much and crashed.

In reality the air speed gauge was completely malfunctioning because a small insect had plugged it. The sensor measures wind speed using a small, one-half inch hole in the exterior of the plane, and that hole had been plugged while the plane had been sitting at the airport for three weeks.

It was first thought that one of the common mud dauber wasps plugged the hole with mud, but later it was proved that another wasp, called a **"keyhole wasp,"** was more likely the culprit. This wasp looks for pre-existing tunnels or holes to nest in, and seals the hole with a neat mud plug. The plug made by keyhole wasps is somewhat hidden inside the hole, so it was easily missed when the plane was inspected before takeoff.

Homeowners Set Houses Ablaze

In two separate incidents recently, homeowners trying to kill a spider that crawled indoors inadvertently set their homes on fire.

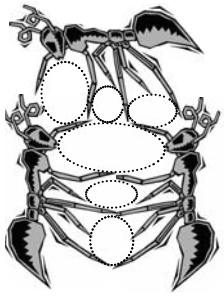
In the first incident, a man used a can of spray paint and a lighter to try to kill a spider in his laundry room, but it ended up causing a fire that spread throughout the home, *causing $60,000 in damage* to the structure and house contents.

In a separate incident, a woman ignited some towels to try to kill a spider, but it ended up lighting the duplex on fire. The woman was charged with aggravated arson.

In both cases, for all the damage, there was no record of whether the blaze actually killed the spider they were trying to control. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but friends, our treatments are much safer, and more effective!

Fire Ants Build Rafts

Red fire ants have an amazing ability to survive floods. As waters rise, the ants stream from their nests, start gripping onto ants beside them, and form living ant "rafts" that float and carry them to safety. This is an extraordinary engineering feat, considering each ant is denser than water and would normally sink.



New research this year, using a CT scan, has given us a closer look at how they do this. Each ant connects to another ant between 8 and 20 times—all six legs connect to another ant, and each ant is contacted many times by neighbor ants. Besides connecting to neighbor ants, each ant actually pushes other ants away, which introduces air pockets between their bodies. By doing this, the mass of heavy ants easily floats downstream or to the nearest solid ground.