

# *Healthy Colorado Schools*

## **OCTOBER TIP OF THE MONTH: BOXELDER BUGS**



For many, the boxelder bug needs no introduction. It's about 1/2 inch long as an adult, black with three red lines on the thorax (the part just behind the head), a red line along each side, and a diagonal red line on each wing. Boxelder bugs are entering schools and homes as the weather cools off, looking for a protected place to spend the winter. They are primarily a nuisance pest, annoying people by crawling on exteriors and inside buildings on warm fall and winter days.

Their favorite food is boxelder seed pods, which are found only on the female boxelder tree. These bugs seldom develop in sufficient numbers to be a nuisance unless a female boxelder tree is in the neighborhood. Because boxelder bugs usually overwinter near the trees that they feed on, the removal of one or two problem trees may help.

Boxelder bugs enter through cracks and crevices in walls, doors, under windows and around foundations, particularly on south and west exposures. Screening or sealing cracks or other entrances into the building is important. When the bugs begin to congregate on building exteriors, they may be sprayed with laundry detergent and water mixes, which are cheap, safe and effective when applied directly to boxelder bugs. Drawbacks of detergent sprays are that they will kill only if they contact the insect directly, and they may damage vegetation. Once boxelder bugs have entered the building, temporary control measures include vacuuming and/or spraying individual insects with household cleaners.

Remember that boxelder bugs don't bite humans or pets, don't transmit diseases, and don't eat house plants! The most effective approach is to seal entry points and prevent these bugs from entering the school – and if they do get in, vacuum them up.

**Keep Colorado schools pest free**