Nuisance Invaders

“Bugs” that enter and homes but do not reproduce within a home

Damage produced – only that they are there
Insects that commonly survive winter within homes

- Western conifer seed bugs
- Boxelder bugs
- Elm leaf beetles
- Cluster flies
- Elm seed bugs
Some Winter Time Residents of Colorado Homes
Cluster Flies
*Pollenia* spp.

The most common indoor flies during the cool months
Curly golden hairs mark cluster flies
Cluster flies are parasites of earthworms – they are not ‘filth flies’
Cluster fly searching for a site to lay eggs
Cluster fly larvae and worm host
There are three common species of cluster flies found within homes in Colorado

- *Pollenia pediculata*
- *Pollenia rudis*
- *Pollenia angustigena*
Scenario for Cluster Fly Invasion of a Building

- Flies move to sunlit vertical surfaces during period when seeking winter shelter
- Flies move upward as sun sets
- Flies enter upper areas of building, cluster behind walls
Throughout winter cluster flies are in a semi-dormant condition known as diapause.

Metabolism slows, reproduction ceases, they do not feed – and if they are stirred to activity they often fly “drunkenly”
There are some other kinds of flies that will be found indoors and these are reviewed in Fact Sheet 5.502 Flies in the Home. Among these are some other "winter flies" that use homes for winter shelter, particularly the "blue bottle flies" (Calliphora species) and the black blow fly (Phormia regina). The habits of these differ in some important ways from those of cluster flies and are discussed below.
Boxelder Bug  *Boisea trivittata*
Insects crash computers

OURAY — Bugs brought down Ouray County's computer system over the Thanksgiving holidays, but the bugs weren't of the computer-litch variety. They were bona fide insects.

The bugs — the black-and-orange, antennawaving box elder variety — were found inside a new computer server by computer technicians. The technicians were called in by county workers who returned from Thanksgiving vacation to find their computers inoperable. The county's next call for help went to an exterminator.

The bugs, which were apparently attracted by the server's heat, knocked out computers in the treasurer's, clerk and assessor's office and held up payroll checks for county employees.
Boxelder Bugs

Fact Sheet No. 5.522

by F.B. Peairs*

For most people, the boxelder bug needs no introduction. This bug is 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. The immature forms (Figure 3) are smaller and are easily distinguished from the adults (Figure 1) by their red abdomens and lack of wings. The small milkweed bug (Figure 4) and the goldenrain tree bug (Figure 5) are local insects that are sometimes confused with boxelder bugs. Boxelder bugs become a nuisance in and around homes from fall through early spring.

Boxelder bugs feed on a variety of plants, but their favorite food is boxelder seed pods, which are found only on the female boxelder tree, and occasionally maple seeds. These bugs seldom develop in sufficient numbers to be a nuisance unless a female boxelder tree is in the neighborhood.

Figure 1: Boxelder bug. (Photo courtesy of Clemson University Cooperative Extension.)

Quick Facts

- Boxelder bugs are a nuisance in and around homes from fall through early spring.
- The bug overwinters as an adult in protected places such as houses or other buildings.
- Removing female boxelder trees is the most permanent solution to the problem, although this may not be practical or desirable.
- Laundry detergents offer safe, effective control when applied directly to the insects.
Western conifer-seed bug  *Leptoglossus occidentalis*
Conifer Seed Bugs

Fact Sheet No. 5.588

by W.S. Cranshaw

Conifer seed bugs (Leptoglossus occidentalis) are a common fall and winter nuisance in Colorado homes. They are fairly large insects (about 5/8 to 3/4 inch long) and look rather bizarre. They fly readily and can produce an odd, somewhat piney odor when provoked. These behaviors can alarm homeowners. However, conifer seed bugs are harmless.

Members of the leaf-footed bug family, they eat seeds and do not bite people. They enter homes in search of warm, protected sites to overwinter. This habit is shared by many other insects, such as boxelder bugs and elm leaf beetles. They do not reproduce in the home or damage household items. Conifer seed bugs usually die in a week or two if not allowed to drink water.

Life History and Habits

Conifer seed bugs primarily feed and develop on seeds of various trees and shrubs. They prefer pines, Douglas-fir and other conifers but also occur in some deciduous trees and shrubs. Adults continue to feed on cones until they move to winter shelter. There is only one generation per year.

Control in the Home

There is probably little that will effectively control the occasional nuisance movement of conifer seed bugs into homes. The best action is to ensure that homes are well sealed during September and October, when most insects migrate from trees to buildings and other winter shelter. It is probable that insecticide applications to building exteriors, particularly directed at cracks and openings where the insects may enter, should assist in reducing numbers found indoors. However, insecticides have not been tested against these insects. Do not use insecticides to control insects already in the

Quick Facts

- Conifer seed bugs are a common fall and winter nuisance in Colorado homes.
- They develop on seeds of various plants, particularly pines.
- They have a somewhat bizarre appearance and may produce a piney defensive odor when disturbed. However, they are harmless to people and do not breed indoors.
- They can be difficult to completely exclude from homes. Careful sealing of exterior openings in late summer and early fall is particularly important.
A significant new nuisance invader of homes in summer.
Fecal spotting

Photo by Ryan Davis, Utah State University
Develops on seeds of elm
No harm to trees
Moves into buildings in summer, early autumn
Nuisance issues, some associated odor
There is a new Extension Fact Sheet on this insect

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Elm Seed Bug: A New Nuisance Pest in Colorado Homes

Fact Sheet No. 5.619
Insect Series | Home & Garden

M. Shrader

The elm seed bug (Arocatus melanocephalus) is a pest native to Europe and the Mediterranean region and was first detected in 2012 in Idaho. Since then it has been detected in Utah, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and, most recently, in Colorado. The first detections of this insect were made in July 2017, and it is presently known in Mesa, Delta and Montrose counties. With the widespread presence of its host plant, Siberian elm, this insect will likely spread through much of Colorado.

This insect attaches to a plant and may become active in homes during the winter if temperatures are favorable outside. Adults will overwinter in structures, but do not reproduce in the home. When spring arrives they will venture out from overwintering sites to feed on developing elm seeds. The elm seed bugs are a further nuisance because they can produce a pungent odor similar to bitter almonds from abdominal scent glands.

The adult bugs are the stage normally present in a home. These are about 1/3 inch long and oval with red eyes and yellow legs. The leg ends are black. The bugs commonly feed on elm seeds. If the infestation is heavy, seeds may be damaged, resulting in a reduced number of elms capable of reproducing.

Quick Facts
• The elm seed bug is an insect that has newly arrived in Colorado that feeds on the seeds of Siberian elm.
• Elm seed bug cause nuisance problems by moving into buildings in summer and early autumn. They do not reproduce indoors.
• The best management of elm seed bugs is to seal cracks and crevices around doors and windows.

This document is intended for use by Extension agents and others who work with homeowners and gardeners.
Multiplume moth
Alucita montana

- A fairly common nuisance invader of homes in upper elevation, forested sites of the state.
- Larvae develop as a leafminer, feeding on snowberry.
Some Winter Time Residents of Colorado Homes
General Principles for Managing Nuisance Household Invaders

Seal openings of home prior to time when insects enter the building
  – Barrier insecticide applications at entry points can supplement
  – Dusts are sometimes blown behind walls

Treat/remove host plants

Dispatch individual insects as they are observed
Keep in Mind:
These insects are not reproducing in the home

Ultimately they will move back outdoors or die
Insects that use homes for overwintering shelter are in **diapause**.

They do not feed nor reproduce while in diapause.
...and remember -
These kinds of problems happen to the nicest of people

*It's Not Your Fault!*
Let us always keep “nuisance invaders” in proper perspective.
A Poem on the Subject:

The Boxelder Bug Prays

I want so little,
For so little time,
A south window,
A wall to climb,
A radio knob,

Nothing to eat,
Nothing to rob,
Not love, not power,
Not even a penny,
Forgive me only for being so many.

- Bill Holm