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MAY/JUNE 2013

Pest Patrol News

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Summer Stinging & Biting Pests

Summer is the time the entire insect world seems intent on either stealing our blood or stinging us so we'll leave them alone. Either way, they can make life miserable.

Most of these pests are problems in our area, and those that aren't you'll meet someday if you travel around the country.

Pests that bite and suck blood include bed bugs, conenose bugs, fleas, ticks, mosquitoes, chiggers and other mites, lice, biting midges, and horse flies and other biting flies.

Most of these pests inject a very effective local anesthetic so you don't even feel it as they are stealing your blood. But the allergic reaction to the

compounds they inject in you is what causes the eventual itching. And because they tap directly into your bloodstream, these pests are capable of transmitting various diseases when they bite us.

Pests that inject venom when they bite or sting include honey bees, bumble bees, solitary bees, wasps, hornets, yellowjackets, fire ants, harvester ants, spiders, stinging caterpillars, scorpions, and certain centipedes. Because these pests are trying to defend themselves, most of their stings hurt



instantly—OUCH!

These stings aren't as likely to transmit any diseases, but they can be dangerous because of the venom that is injected, and when you get stung multiple times by a colony of some of these pests, it can be particularly dangerous.

Somewhere over 2% of our population is highly allergic to bee, wasp, and ant stings. After just one sting you should immediately seek medical attention if you are, or think you might be, highly allergic.

Pest Prevention Tip of the Month

Thick ivy may look good growing up the side of a house, but it eventually damages the surface it attaches to, and it harbors pests like birds, wasps, mice and ants. Keep ivy and other climbing plants trimmed down from walls, or even better yet, keep it trimmed so it is five feet away from the foundation.

Landscaping & Pests

This is the time of year when many people are spending time in their yards, planting, pruning, and caring for their landscapes. It is important to be aware of how your landscaping affects pest populations around your home.



Many trees and shrubs have problems with **aphids or other sucking insects**. These insects excrete honeydew, a sweet, partially digested plant sap that is a main food of many ants. Plants with these sucking pests not only attract ants, but help feed and grow entire ant colonies.

Shrubs with **foliage that touches the ground** are good hiding places for rats and mice as they wonder about at night. These should be pruned up off the ground. Areas near your home that have high grass or weeds need to be mowed occasionally. **Ground covers**, especially ivy beds, are a particular problem because

they provide cover for rodents, as well as for certain kinds of cockroaches and other pests. If you can trim groundcovers yearly to keep them low, that will help, although it doesn't eliminate the problem.

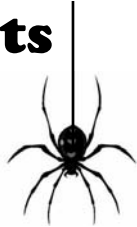
Mulching around a foundation may help keep down weeds, but mulches can create moist conditions that attract pests. Whenever possible, replace wood-based mulches bordering your foundation with the new rubber mulch made from old tires, or a stone or gravel mulch.

Finally, this is a good time to **check any sprinklers** and make sure they are watering your plants only, and not the side of your home. When sprinkler water hits the side of your home it can increase the moisture content inside the wall, as well as under your home. Both situations can increase pest problems.



Deadly Spiders in Shipments

When a shipment of tires from Arizona arrived in England in January, the surprise upon opening the container was a heavy infestation of black widow spiders inside the container.



Apparently black widow egg cases had hatched during the 5,000 mile journey. Fortunately they were discovered and exterminated before they spread.

In December a shipment of machinery parts sent from Texas to England also had black widow spiders.

Black widows are widespread here but not established in England. Their venom is *15 times stronger than rattlesnake venom*, but they inject less of it than a rattlesnake bite. Black widow spider bites can make a person very sick, and in rare cases they are fatal, so prompt treatment by a doctor is important.

A Wasp That Loves Baseball

Here's an unusual insect. Recent research in Kansas reported that a ground-nesting wasp called the *smoky-winged buprestid bandit* likes to nest in the soil in baseball and softball fields. These places provide lots of flat, hard-packed sandy soil and full sun locations that the wasps seem to prefer to tunnel into. These are solitary wasps; each female burrows into the ground, then drags down into the tunnel insects they have paralyzed, and lays an egg on each one. The eggs hatch into wasp larvae that feed on the paralyzed insects.

But not only do they like to nest in baseball fields, but these wasps are involved in baseball in another way. The wasps provision their nest almost exclusively with buprestid beetles, and one beetle

that they seem to particularly like, whenever it is in the area, is the invasive emerald ash borer. This is the insect that is killing American ash trees (perhaps 100 million trees so far) in so many parts of this country—the very tree that is a

favorite wood for making baseball bats!

Unfortunately, the wasps do not kill enough emerald ash borers to control the pest, but some entomologists use the wasp nests as an indicator of whether these destructive pests are in an area.



Bird Nest Pests

Birds and their singing may be sweet, but their nests can be a source of pests that you don't want coming indoors. It is usually not a problem for people until the young birds vacate their nests. Once this happens the pests eventually abandon the nests and start searching for a new food source. If the bird nest is under the eaves or somewhere else attached to your home, some of the pests may find their way into your home.

Many of the bugs in bird nests are **parasites that suck blood** from the young birds and adults. Among the blood-suckers in nests are bird bed bugs, which are very similar to regular bed bugs and also feed on humans, kissing bugs that can transmit Chagas disease to people, and a variety of blood-sucking ticks, fleas, and mites.

Besides blood-suckers, other pests are known **scavengers** in bird nests, feeding on the feathers, droppings, etc. These pests include clothes moths that feed on woolens, fur, and feathers, carpet beetles that feed on woolens and stored foods, drugstore beetles that feed on stored foods, and other pests you don't want indoors.



Because of these pests in bird nests, either try to discourage the construction of any nest that is directly attached to your home, or remove it as soon as the young birds leave. Nests further out in tree limbs, where the branches do not contact your home, are usually not a threat.

Pest Myth Corrected

You may have heard the old saying that "house flies bite before a storm." Although responsible for disease transmission, house flies cannot bite. But stable flies do bite, and they look very similar to house flies. Stable flies may be able to sense a drop in barometric pressure before a storm, because they often take refuge on a porch or indoors when a storm is coming on.

Giant Snails Are Invading Florida

A recent infestation of the giant African land snail in Miami-Dade County is causing big problems. The snail, first spotted in September, 2011, can grow 8 inches in length and will even eat stucco, which they devour for the calcium they need for their shells. They eat over 500 species of plants, and can carry a parasitic rat lungworm which is potentially deadly to humans. In some Caribbean countries where the snails have become established, the snails' hard, sharp shells actually cause tires to blow out on roads.

Over 1,000 of the snails are being caught each week. Previous infestations in Florida have been eradicated, but at a considerable cost.

