

# Boxelder bugs invading



The redcoats are coming! The redcoats are coming!

With my apologies to Paul Revere, redcoated boxelder bugs are marching toward our homes.

Adult boxelder bugs are large black insects with reddish-orange markings on their wings (top photo). The immature nymphs have red as their dominant color (bottom photo).

These bugs spend their summers feeding on the sap of soft-wooded maples, including silver and boxelder maples. They don't damage the trees and most of us never notice the bugs until they knock on our doors in fall.

Now that temperatures have cooled off, the bugs are looking for warmth. You can often find them sunning themselves on the south and west-facing sides of homes.

Don't worry—boxelder bugs are almost completely harmless. They don't breed indoors and they won't eat your food. They won't bite your toes and they won't eat your furniture. They are just looking for a warm place to

spend the winter.

You can leave them alone and after a few hard frosts the problem is over.


If the bugs are causing you a major nuisance, consider spraying them with detergent. Mix three tablespoons of liquid detergent per gallon of water. Detergent sprays only kill those bugs that are sprayed upon and have no residual effect. Repeated detergent sprays will be necessary (and your home's siding will look cleaner too).

For severe infestations, toxic insecticides can be sprayed on and around the foundation of the home. Insecticides with synthetic pyrethroids are recommended since they work under cool temperatures. These include permethrin, cyfluthrin, and esfenvalerate. But exposing yourself to a toxic chemical to kill a harmless bug is a questionable practice.

The best defense is to “pest-proof” your home. Caulk any cracks along the foundation or windows. A common entry point is where siding meets the foundation of a building—this is often where insects can crawl under and get access to the basement or wall voids. Caulk or stuff material in this juncture to prevent this problem.

Use weather stripping along doorways. Check roof vents, ventilators and vent fans; use screening that is small enough to exclude most insects. Seal utility openings where pipes and wires enter the foundation or siding. Holes can be plugged with caulk, cement, expandable foam, steel wool, copper mesh, or other products.

“Leaky” homes can have high boxelder bug populations in the attic or wall voids. In these cases, they can be a major, albeit nonaggressive nuisance.

Any boxelder bugs that enter your home can be swept outside or vacuumed. Avoid squishing the bugs because their “juices” can stain fabrics. If vacuuming, avoid stain problems by using a hose attachment. Empty the dust bag immediately to prevent the bugs from escaping out of the vacuum. 



Boxelder bug nymphs

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