



Bug-Wise

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Spring Potpourri: Spring is a busy time, bug-wise and otherwise. There are chores to be done in the lawn, the flowerbed, and the vegetable garden, and you still have to take care of the house and pets. Here are a few of the insect-related issues that most homeowners need to keep in mind at this time.

Fire Ants: It's spring—time to apply that first application of fire ant bait. Don't try to treat individual fire ant mounds with granular baits. Use a small, hand held spreader to broadcast the granules over the entire lawn and let the foraging workers carry them back to their mounds. And don't use too much. For most baits it only takes 1 to 2 lbs per acre. Read the label before you treat! Baits are cheap, easy to apply, and they work great, but they are slow-acting. It takes four to six weeks for baits to work. Plan on treating again around Independence Day and Labor Day, even if you don't see any fire ant mounds. If you apply baits three times a year on this schedule, you won't see many fire ant mounds in your yard. Keep a can of one of the dry mound treatments on hand to eliminate any mounds that survive the bait treatment. See Extension Publication 2429, Control Fire Ants in Your Yard, for more details.

Fire Ants in Pastures, Hayfields, and Barnyards: Baits also work great for controlling fire ants in pastures, hayfields, and barnyards, but only certain baits are labeled for use around grazing animals. See Extension Publication 2493, Control Fire Ants in Pastures, Hayfields, and Barnyards for details.

Azalea lace bugs: Azaleas with bleached-looking or stippled leaves are most likely infested with azalea lace bugs, but check to be sure. Spider mites cause similar symptoms, but require different treatments. If lace bugs are the problem, you will probably find nymphs and adults on the undersides of the leaves and you will definitely see their dark, shellac-like deposits of fecal material. Heavily infested plants are unsightly and unthrifty. Azaleas growing in full sun are especially susceptible. For quick control of heavy infestations, spray with an insecticide containing acephate (Bonide Systemic Insect Control is one example) and follow-up with a soil drench application of one of the imidacloprid products, like Bayer Advanced Tree and Shrub Insect Control. This imidacloprid drench is a good preventative treatment for azalea lace bugs—slow-acting, but long-lasting. It is also fairly expensive, so you probably won't want to treat all the azaleas in your landscape. Focus on plantings that have a history of lace bug problems or plantings growing in full sun. See Extension Publication 2369, page 17, Insect Pests of Perennial Plants in the Home Landscape, for more information.

Paper Wasps: Paper wasps overwinter as mated females and begin new nests each spring. As long as they build their nests in out of the way places where people won't encounter them, these insects are actually beneficial because they prey on caterpillar pests. But nests in tool sheds, in feed rooms, in gates, under house eaves, and in other frequently used areas will probably cause problems, sooner or later. It is easier, and safer, to eliminate such nests when they are small and have only a few wasps on them. Keep a can of aerosol wasp spray on hand for this purpose. Be aware that the "long-range" spray cans that shoot up to 18 feet or more are not always the best choice, because they are hard to aim. Often, the products with the shorter range but broader spray pattern work best. See Extension Publication 2331, Control of Insect Pests in and Around the Home Lawn, page 14, for more information on bees and wasps.

Ticks and Fleas: Tick and flea activity increases in the spring. Protect pets by treating with an appropriate 'on-pet' flea and tick treatment at regular intervals. This will help keep free ranging pets from bringing ticks into the yard. Be aware that cats are more insecticide sensitive than dogs and many treatments that are labeled for use on dogs can't be applied to cats. Fipronil works well on ticks and fleas, and there are labeled products for dogs and cats. Permethrin products are only labeled for dogs. Several other on-pet tick treatments are available from your local Co-Op or veterinarian. Read the label carefully before you buy.

Use labeled lawn products containing permethrin, cyfluthrin, or carbaryl to control ticks and fleas in the lawn. A hose end sprayer is one of the easiest ways to treat lawns. Knowing a little about tick biology will help you know where to treat. Engorged female ticks drop off their host and deposit their egg masses, which hatch into hundreds of 'seed ticks', wherever they happen to fall. This can be anywhere in the yard, but occurs most commonly in areas where the pet spends time resting. This could be under shrubs, under the porch, or in other similar areas. Don't overlook these key sites when treating for ticks. This is also true for fleas. Flea infestations are usually concentrated around areas where pets spend time resting. See pages 17 and 17 of Extension Publication 2331, Control of Insect Pests in and Around the Home Lawn, for more information on flea and tick control.

Colorado Potato Beetles: These insects can severely defoliate Irish potatoes, resulting in reduced yields. Both the yellow and black striped adults and their red and black grubs cause damage. This insect also occasionally attacks other solonaceous crops, such as eggplants and tomatoes. Hand-picking can be effective for light infestations on smaller plantings, but a foliar insecticide spray is required for heavy infestations or large plantings. Insecticides containing the active ingredient spinosad work great on potato beetles, and some formulations are approved for organic gardening. Fertilome, Bore, Bagworm, Leafminer, and Tent Caterpillar Spray, and Spinosad Lawn and Garden Spray are two examples. These spinosad products are most commonly used to control caterpillar pests and thrips, but they also work on some leaf-feeding beetle pests, especially Colorado potato beetles. See Extension Publication 2347, Insect Pests of the Home Vegetable Garden, page 4-5, and page 12.

Clothes Moths and Carpet Beetles: With so much outdoor activity it is easy to forget about those wool suits and sweaters we have stored in the closet. But if you don't take time to store wool, silk, and other susceptible clothing articles properly, you may be in for a disappointment when you get them out again next fall. Clothes moths and carpet beetles especially like soiled clothing. Sweat stains, skin oils and skin flakes just provide them with extra nutrition. Have wool items cleaned before you store them. This will kill any eggs or larvae that are already present and reduce the potential for infestation. Store clothing in 'bug-tight' containers. Clothes moths and carpet beetles can't lay eggs in items they can't reach. Many dry cleaners offer to wrap items in mothproof storage bags. Store sweaters and other susceptible items in plastic boxes with tight-fitting lids. See Extension Publication 2443, Control Household Insect Pests, pages 22-25, for more information on fabric pests and their control.

Storing Bird Seeds: Did you store those leftover birdseed in the closet for the summer? You might want to reconsider, because stored birdseed are a common breeding source for stored product pests, such as rice weevils and Indian meal moths. Infestations that get started in birdseed or other stored grain items can then spread to the kitchen pantry. Of course the insects won't find them if you store them in the freezer or in insect-proof containers. See Extension Publication 2443, Control Household Insect Pests, pages 26-29.

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This information is for educational and preliminary planning purposes only. Brand names mentioned in this publication are used as examples only. No endorsement of these products is intended. Other appropriately labeled products containing similar active ingredients should provide similar levels of control. Always read and follow the insecticide label.