

Bugged: Here's What To Do When This Red-Striped Bug Moves In

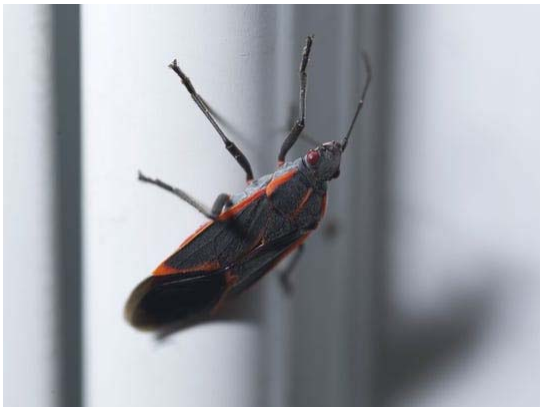
Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Aug. 30, 2019

Q. I have a small, dark red-striped bug invading my house in mass. They seem to come from nowhere and will suddenly show up on the outside of my house in a mass of seething bugs! Some have even come into the house under the door.

Most of the bugs are black with red lines around the edges of their body and on their underside, but others are smaller and almost all red color.

What are they, and are they harmful to humans or plants?

A. What you're describing sounds like a boxelder bug, *Boisea rubrolineata*. They're about half an inch long as an adult, with three red lines on their back and a red abdomen. The nymphs, young bugs, are almost all red. Boxelder bugs usually feed on the leaves, flowers and seedpods of box elder trees, a small native maple that grows all across the United States, but it will stray to domestic fruits, nuts and grapes. They lay eggs in the cracks and crevices bark on boxelder trees, and adults and nymphs can migrate in impressively large groups.



The Boxelder bug (Photo: Saul Young, Knoxville News Sentinel)

They don't usually do significant damage to crops or ornamentals unless populations are large enough; then they may cause damage from feeding on the fruit and staining the leaves or fruit with frass, also known as bug poop. They can also enter houses and become an annoyance there. The good news is that they typically don't bite and they don't carry diseases so they're not harmful to humans.

In late summer and fall they usually start to look for overwintering places in the cracks and crevices of houses or sheds. This time of year they may also be looking to cool off by finding shelter in the same cracks and crevices or near doorways that maybe leaking air conditioned air.



Western boxelder bug (Photo: submitted)

The [University of California Integrated Pest Management website](#) recommends that you "repair torn screens and close up places where the bugs can enter the house, such as cracks around doors and windows and attic or basement vents. Use caulk, weather-stripping, fine-mesh screen, steel wool, or expandable foam as appropriate. Boxelder bugs that enter the home may be controlled by hand-collecting or vacuuming. Repeat as needed."

Other ways to manage populations for the bugs is to eliminate any hiding places near the house. This could be weeds or grass near the foundation of the home or piles of boards, leaves or rock that they might hide in during the day.

You can drown the boxelder bugs by washing them off walls, rocks or tree trunks with a forceful stream of water.



Asian lady beetles, boxelder bugs (photo) and crickets typically visit homes that provide easy entry as they seek refuge from changing weather. (Photo: Provide)

For more information on boxelder bugs go to the [Integrated Pest Management site](http://ipm.ucanr.edu/) at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/>

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.