

Box Elder Bugs

Box elder bugs can become a household problem for a few weeks in the spring and fall. In the fall, they cluster on the warm, sunny side of white or light colored homes and structures, seeking a warm place for the winter. They sometimes make their way into attics, wall voids, or the living areas of homes which are not properly caulked or screened. They become a problem in the spring when they are simply trying to get outside.

Box elder bugs are found throughout Michigan, wherever there are box elder trees. They are found on, or in close association with, the seed bearing female box elder trees. Other food materials include maple, ash, oak, and lilac. The adult bug is about ½ inch in length. Their black and red cross pattern makes it easy to distinguish this insect from related species, such as stinkbugs or milkweed bugs. The adults and immature bugs, which are red, leave the trees and move to structures in the late August or September seeking hibernation sites. On warm spring days, those bugs which have found their way into the home to escape the cold, will gather at bright windows where their only harm is to occasionally spot the windows or curtains. Don't use insecticides to control these bugs inside the house, because a fly swatter and a vacuum cleaner will do a safer job. For long term control, deny them access to the home by making use of caulking, screens, screen vents, etc. One alternative is to remove the female, seed bearing box elder trees, -- if they're in your own yard. However, destroying the tree is not a guarantee of control since they will travel a long distance to find the right overwintering location.

When the box elder bugs are clustering in the yard outside, you can consider a spot treatment of a synthetic pyrethroid spray, directed right at the insects. It does no good to spray the surfaces upon which the bugs land, because once the spray dries, the bugs do not pick up enough pesticide to kill them and this leads to an increase of pesticide resistance.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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