



Bug-Wise

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Office: 1-662-325-2085

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: Its spring—time to apply fire ant bait. Baits are cheap, easy to apply and they work! Don't try to treat individual mounds with bait; spread it over the entire yard. Don't use too much; it only takes one to two pounds per acre. Read the label. Be patient; 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. Use liquid mound drenches or dry powder mound treatments to eliminate any mounds that survive the bait treatment. For especially sensitive areas where you really don't want to have any fire ants consider using a granular insecticide containing fipronil, in addition to the bait treatments. See Extension Publication 2429, Control Fire Ants In Your Yard, for more details.

Termites: Termites swarm in the spring, but they eat wood year round. Having termites swarm inside the house is a sure sign that your home is infested and needs to be treated. But don't wait until you have swarmers to be concerned about termites. Check for mud tubes and other signs of infestation around the outside foundation, and underneath the house if you have a crawl space. Better yet, contact a local pest control company to come inspect your house. If you live in Mississippi, it's a good idea to keep your house treated and under a termite contract.

What to do if you have termites, or just want to get your home treated? This is not a do-it-yourself project! Get bids from several pest control companies and chose one of them. Most companies offer two different methods of treating, liquid perimeter treatments or bait systems. Both methods work. The key advantage of bait systems is that they are less labor intensive to install and use very little insecticide. Their disadvantage is that they take longer to provide control and termite protection ceases if you let your contract lapse—because the technician quits coming to check the bait stations. Liquid treatments take more time and labor to install and use more insecticide, but they give faster control and will continue providing control for several years, even if the termite contract lapses. Liquid termiticide treatments do deteriorate over time and eventually have to be repeated, but most will last for several years. One liquid termiticide containing the active ingredient fipronil, has provided 11 years of residual control in USDA trials. See Extension Publication 531, Subterranean Termite Control, for more information on how to keep your home safe from termites.

Azalea lace bugs: Lace bugs are the number one insect pest of azaleas. Their feeding causes the leaves to have a bleached out look. Individual leaves are stippled with tiny, light-colored spots and have shellac-like deposits of fecal material on the undersides. Heavily infested plants are unsightly and unthrifty. Azaleas growing in full sun are especially susceptible, and since Hurricane Katrina there are a lot more azaleas growing in full sun. Lace bugs overwinter as eggs, but they are hatching into first generation

nymphs now. Bayer Advanced Tree and Shrub Insect Control containing imidacloprid is a useful, easy to apply preventative treatment for azalea lace bugs. You apply this systemic insecticide as a soil drench; the rate depends on the height of the shrub you are treating. Because it takes time for this product to move into the plant and provide control, don't rely on it to eliminate established infestations. Spray heavily infested plants with an insecticide containing acephate. See Extension Publication 2369, Insect Pests of Perennial Plants In the Home Landscape, for more information.

Ticks: Tick activity increases in the spring. Protect pets by treating with an appropriate 'on-pet' 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 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 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. See Extension Publication 2331, Control of Insect Pests In and Around the Home Lawn.

Cutworms: You set out eight tomato plants and cutworms killed five of them! Cutworms are one of the first insect pests that vegetable gardeners face each year. These caterpillars overwinter in the soil as partly grown larvae, or they develop on early spring weeds. In either case, they are already big caterpillars by the time you plant your tomatoes or other transplants, and one caterpillar can cut several small plants in a single night. Prevent cutworm injury to newly transplanted seedlings by spraying the base of the plants and an 10 to 12 inch band of soil around the plants with a garden insecticide containing permethrin or esfenvalerate. Be sure to choose a product that is specifically labeled for use on the garden vegetables you want to treat. Some companies sell pre-diluted, ready-to-use insecticides in trigger pump spray bottles. This is a convenient way to treat small plantings. For a non-insecticide alternative, try wrapping the stems of transplants in a piece of wax paper or aluminum foil positioned so that it extends an inch or so below ground and two to three inches above ground. See Extension Publication 2347, Insect Pests of the Home Vegetable Garden, for more information on how to control cutworms and other vegetable insect pests.

Clothes Moths and Carpet Beetles: You probably won't be wearing that wool suit or sweater for a while. But don't just stick it in the closet and forget about it, or you may be in for a disappointment when you get it out again next fall. Take time to store wool, silk, and other susceptible clothing articles properly to avoid infestations of clothes-damaging pests. Fabric pests 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.

Blake Layton, Extension Entomologist

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.