

Urban Pest News

Spotlight on: the Red Headed Centipede

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Agent Notes

As you can see, the newsletter has a new layout; this is thanks to my new secretary Machele Dunlop. Machele is a fantastic addition to the staff of Travis County and has been learning the ropes (and paperwork trail) quickly. She has taken over many of the day to day items that took up a lot of my time, allowing me to focus more on research and programming. I look forward to having Machele stick around for many years in the future!

As always, please feel free to contact me with any questions or if you require CEU classes (please give me at least 35 days notice) at 512-854-9600.

Wizzie Brown,
Extension Program Specialist

Centipedes are members of the subphylum Myriapoda, which means "many legs". The creatures have a head with one pair of antennae along with a long segmented body. Centipedes, unlike millipedes, have wormlike, flattened bodies with one pair of legs per body segment. The first pair of legs have become modified over time to function as claws used to capture prey. These claws are sometimes called fangs since they are connected to poison glands that can inject venom to subdue captured prey.



Centipedes can live from one to six years. They prefer moist, protected habitats such as under stones, rotted logs, leaves or bark. They spend the winter as adults and lay eggs during the warm months. Eggs are usually laid in soil and covered by a sticky substance.

Most centipedes found in Texas are relatively small, but the red headed centipede, *Scolopendra heros*, can reach over nine inches when full grown.

Centipedes are predaceous with many species feeding on other arthropods, such as insects. Their modified pair of legs, or claws, is directly under the head, allowing prey to be injected with venom.

Most centipedes can only bite with their poison claws located directly under the head resulting in a bee-like sting, but the bite of larger species of centipedes may cause discomfort and pain. *Scolopendra* can harm a person with the sharp claws of its many walking legs. Each walking leg is tipped with a sharp claw capable of making tiny cuts in human skin. A poison produced from the attachment point of each leg may be dropped into the wounds resulting in an inflamed and irritated condition. The best rule of thumb is to never handle centipedes.

Tips to prevent centipedes from moving into homes:

- move objects providing harborage such as compost piles, firewood and stones away from the structure
- create a band of gravel, or similar material between the foundation of the home and any flower beds that touch the structure
- occasionally turn the mulch near home to allow it to dry out
- seal cracks or pipe penetrations
- repair weather stripping as needed
- properly ventilate crawl spaces or areas under the home to allow for air flow through the area
- use perimeter sprays around a building's foundation
- inside the home treat crack and crevice areas as well as baseboards, and other hiding places
- treat wall voids may be treated with boric acid or diatomaceous earth

Fire Ant Baits

If you want to receive this newsletter via email contact Machelles at madunlop@ag.tamu.edu

Tips for using fire ant baits:

- make sure ants are actively foraging by placing a slice of hotdog, a potato chip or a small amount of bait near a mound, leave it for 15-30 minutes and then come back to check for fire ant activity
- apply baits when the temperature is between 75-90 degrees
- do not apply baits if it is supposed to rain within 24 hours
- do not run sprinklers for 24 hours
- do not apply baits when there is heavy dew
- use fresh bait; bait that has been opened previously can go rancid causing it to be unattractive to ants and therefore not working
- baits that have been opened, should be stored sealed in the original container; these baits should be used within a year

The second week of September is Fire Ant Awareness Week and fall is a great time to bait for fire ants to reduce the amount of mounds you'll have in the spring.

Fire ant baits are typically created from defatted corn cob grit that is coated with soybean oil which is attractive to fire ants. The soybean oil has the active ingredient (the chemical that kills the ant) dissolved in it. Worker ants pick up bait as food, carry it back to the colony where it is shared among the workers, queen and larvae. Fire ant baits are cost effective, require little labor, pose little toxic threat to people and control ants in an area for a longer period of time than contact insecticides.

Broadcasting baits reduces labor since the bait is applied over an entire treatment area instead searching and applying bait to individual mounds. This method also allows ants to pick up bait that may not have a mound that is visible. The majority of baits are spread at a rate of 1-1 ½ pounds per acre. When baits are over applied, there is no added benefit, it just costs more money.

We're on the Web

<http://insects.tamu.edu/>

Scuds (Amphipods)

At certain times of the year, typically following heavy rains, I will receive calls about scuds. People never know what they have when they call, but once they begin describing the creature, it's pretty easy to figure out. The creature they describe is usually littered along the floor, often near a door, is a reddish-pink color and curled up. These are scuds, dead scuds, but still scuds. At this point, the creatures have already died, so they just need to be swept up and disposed of.

Living amphipods are yellowish to brown in color and live in moist areas, such as under mulch or groundcover. When there are heavy rain events or overwatering with sprinklers, these creatures often move into structures where they end up dying from lack of moisture, turning reddish-pink in the process. Amphipods are crustacean and are closely related to shrimp.



Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.

Boxelder Bugs

Boxelder bugs often become pests in the fall months when they enter homes to seek shelter from cold winter weather. These true bugs are about ½ inch long, brownish-black with distinctive red markings. They have red lines running lengthwise along the pronotum, the area behind the head, as well as the outside margins of the wings. Midwing, where the wings become membranous, the lines follow the edge of the hardened part of the wing. Immatures, or nymphs, resemble adults, but are smaller and wingless. Nymphs are bright red, but become brownish-black as they mature.



Typically in fall, boxelder bugs will gather on the bark of boxelder trees and then migrate to locate an overwintering spot. Only adults will overwinter. Often these bugs will hide in cracks of walls, door and window casings, around foundations or in tree holes. During warm days of winter and spring, adults often emerge and move onto light colored surfaces to sun themselves. Even though these insects are harmless to humans, they can become a nuisance pest when they invade homes. Boxelder bugs may stain household items with their fecal material. These bugs usually feed on the seeds of female boxelder trees, but may also use various fruit trees for hosts. It is possible for the fruit to become damaged by feeding, leaving scars or dimples.

Tips for control:

- remove female boxelder trees
- eliminate hiding areas such as piles of leaves, rocks or debris
- repair & seal areas where insects can enter the home
- insecticide treatment outside:
 - insecticide treatments should target young exposed bugs found on host trees in the spring and early summer
 - treatment is more successful at this time, reducing numbers to prevent indoor migration
 - insecticides can also be used on hibernation areas such as tree trunks, building foundations or sides of houses
- insecticide treatment inside:
 - target the insects directly since they are often scattered throughout the home
 - dusts may be used to treat crack & crevice areas