

Keeping Fall Creatures Out of the Home

Do you have the Halloween spirit this year? It may be a little early for ghosts, ghouls or goblins, but there are plenty of scary and annoying creatures lurking around homes this time of year.

In October when the weather cools, many kinds of insects take advantage of cracks and crevices, as well as the occasional open garage door to find their way into your living area. While many of these insects lay dormant until springtime, some of them will become active during sunny days when the home heating system lulls them into thinking summer is coming. When this happens, they can fly inside the house and become a real nuisance. While none of these insects can threaten your health, each has its own unique and unpleasant smell.

These Halloween-like pests may include stink bugs, boxelder bugs, multi-colored Asian lady beetle, cluster flies, spiders and many more occasional fall/winter home invaders.

The stink bug becomes a nuisance pest of homes as it is attracted to the outside of houses on warm fall days in search of protected, overwintering sites and can enter houses in large numbers. The stink bug emits a pungent odor when handled.

Boxelder bugs feed on maple seeds in the fall. They often will move indoors to spend the winter as adults in your home.

Multicolored Asian lady beetles congregate on homes or other buildings in search of overwintering sites. They usually select the west or southwest side of a building as the initial congregation area, often finding their way into homes. Lady beetles exude a foul-smelling, yellow defensive chemical which will sometimes cause spotting on walls and other surfaces. Because of this characteristic, it is recommended to never crush them on window drapery, carpet or cloth furniture.

Cluster Flies, sometimes called "attic flies", often become pests in homes. They usually appear in late fall or early winter and again on warm, sunny days in early spring. They buzz around the home and gather in large numbers at windows.

Maybe the most feared Halloween demon is the arachnid that invades our homes this time of year. The most common are probably wolf spiders, but they are not as threatening as they appear. They are mostly harmless to humans but are feared because of their large size and their fierce namesake. As summer transitions to autumn, cooling temperatures prompt them to seek cover and find mates, which ultimately leads them to discover cracks and holes in homes. A common entry point for the spider is under doors.

These fall intruders can be difficult to remove from your home. Many times, folks want to use a pesticide, but it is often easier to just get the vacuum and sweep them up. Since many of the annoying intruders have unpleasant odors to them, it is recommended to use a nylon sock placed in the vacuum hose end to collect them before they are sucked into the vacuum compartment. Once you are finished sweeping them up, simply tie up the sock and dispose of it in the trash or shake the insects back out doors (preferable a distance away from the house so they do not re enter the home).

You can help yourself by doing some bug proofing around the home. It may not keep them all out, but it can limit the number of intruders. Some of the steps to bug proofing include:

- Replace damaged or old screens.
- Seal gaps around doors, door frames, and window frames. Use appropriate screening or mesh on soffits, chimneys and vents including roof ridge vents. Don't forget the window air conditioner.

- Seal gaps at the roof edge, along fascia and wherever utilities like cable wires enter the structure.
- In the home be sure to seal gaps around light fixtures leading into attic spaces.
- Don't forget that firewood can also be a home to intruding insects. Only carry into the home enough wood to burn immediately. In winter, insects lay dormant in the wood until warm cozy temperatures wake them up and they come out to investigate.

A final thought on insects invading the home in the fall. Overwintering insects inside structures often die before spring leaving behind their bodies, which may attract and feed other incidental pests, such as carpet beetles and silverfish. One more reason to take necessary steps to debug your home before they get in.



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