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Extension Solutions for Homes and Gardens

by Paul J. Pugliese

“What’s Bugging You in November?”

This is the time of year that our office gets numerous calls about lady bugs, spiders, wasps, and even scorpions coming inside people’s homes. Did you know that there are over 480 species of native and exotic species of lady beetles in North America? We often refer to these uninvited pests as “incidental invaders” because they are only seeking the cozy warmth of your house for shelter throughout the winter. For the majority of the year, these critters would much rather be outside hunting and frolicking in the warm sun. They really don’t want to be inside your home any more than you would like them to be there.

Most of these insects and arachnids are actually good bugs from an ecological perspective. These good bugs are essential to maintain the delicate balance of nature in your garden and landscaping. Lady bugs, wasps, spiders, and even scorpions are actually predators that feed on bad bugs such as aphids, mites, mealybugs, and scale insects which can damage your landscape plants and vegetable gardens. Yes, believe it or not we actually need these bugs! In reality, we should be thankful for these uninvited guests in our homes. Try convincing your family and friends that this is something to be thankful for while you sit down to that turkey dinner and everyone is getting dive-bombed by flying lady beetles.

It might be a hard sell to convince people that these insects are actually doing you a favor by showing up inside your home. The reality is that the presence of these pests is an indication that something might be wrong with your home energy efficiency which may even be costing you higher electric or gas bills! If your home has cracks and holes large enough to allow insects such as scorpions, millipedes, and lady bugs inside, then these same openings are also letting heated air get out. Insects that are trying to escape the winter chill just follow that nice current of warm air directly inside your home.



The best long-term solution to preventing these pests from coming inside is to better weather-proof your home, which has the added benefit of saving on energy costs. You may have to do some detective work on your knees in the attic and crawl spaces under your house to find entry holes. Be sure to check all weather-stripping around door frames, holes in walls, floors, and window screens. Replace weather-stripping, caulk open holes with a sealant, and stuff larger openings with steel wool. Look under sinks in cabinets and bathrooms where pipes and wiring

might enter your house. Anywhere you see light coming from the outside, there is a hole big enough for a scorpion or spider to come inside and heat to get out.

When you do find these bugs in your home, it is not necessary to spray with insecticides to kill them. Most home insecticides only work on contact, which means that they will not have any long term residue to keep out these bugs—no matter how much and how often you reapply them. If you think about it, these products are intentionally designed to be short lived because you, your children, pets, and in-laws have to live there too! It's best to avoid pesticides in the home all together.

The best method for getting rid of these pests, if they do find their way inside, is to vacuum or sweep them up and dump them back outside. Keep in mind that many bugs, especially lady bugs, will stain your carpet and walls if they are stepped on and crushed. So, carefully removing them is the best option! You may also want to change your vacuum bag frequently if you have collected a lot of lady bugs because they will start to smell after a few days (as do most uninvited guests). Glue boards and sticky traps are also a great way to capture all kinds of uninvited pests. Be sure to hide these boards behind furniture, inside cabinets, closets, basements, and other dark places. Place them where people and animals won't accidentally come into contact with them.

One other tactic you might want to consider for prevention is to take a look at the landscape around your home. Research has shown that having plants right up against the foundation of your house greatly increases the chances of bugs invading your house. Consider moving shrubs at least two feet away from the foundation and replace organic mulches with gravel or pebbles to act as a buffer zone. Insects don't like to cross over this rocky barrier if they don't have any protection from plants and mulch.

So, the next time you catch a spider, scorpion, or lady bug, be sure to thank them for letting you know that some of your costly heating is going to waste! And depending on your perspective, we would like to wish you all a happy or bah hum-bug Thanksgiving! Contact our office if you have specific questions on indoor pests or if you would like more information on these topics visit our website and click on the link to UGA publications.

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