

As the weather gets colder, many insects are trying to find a warm place. Unfortunately, many times that warm place is in our homes. A common culprit that makes their way into the home is boxelder bugs. Boxelder bugs are about ½ inch long, black insects with reddish-orange markings on their wings. The immature nymphs have red as their dominant color. Although boxelder bugs are a nuisance, they are essentially harmless. They do not cause harm to humans or pets and do not reproduce indoors. When they are found in the home, they should just be swept outside or vacuumed. Be careful when squishing the bugs because their “juices” can stain fabrics.

The best way to reduce boxelder bugs in the home is to prevent them from entering. Be sure all doors, windows, and screens are sealed tightly. If you are not sure, observe the edges to see if light can shine through. If so, they need to be sealed tighter. When possible, limit opening doors or windows without a screen. Inspect around the home's foundation for cracks and be sure to seal cracks if any are found.

If you observe boxelder bugs on your siding or around the outdoor side of windows, detergent can be used to spray them. Mix 3 to 5 tablespoons of liquid detergent per gallon of water. Detergent sprays will only kill the bugs that are sprayed and do not provide any residual. If boxelder bugs are found in large numbers outside the house, insecticides can also be used as a chemical barrier around the outside of the home. Insecticides with synthetic pyrethroids such as permethrin, cyfluthrin and esfenvalerate, are recommended since they still work under cool temperatures. Sevin, a popular insecticide, loses its effectiveness under cool temperatures. Remember to always read and follow the labeled directions on all pesticides.

Many times the source of boxelder bugs are box elder trees. Boxelder bugs feed on the leaves and seeds of box elder trees and can commonly be found this time of year in large numbers around the base of box elder trees. If you happen to battle boxelder bug invasions year after year, a last resort control measure can be to cut down the box elder trees to help eliminate the number of boxelder bugs in your yard. However, boxelder bugs do not exclusively feed on box elder trees so it may not completely resolve a boxelder bug problem. For more information, contact the Extension office at 701-524-2253, e-mail Alicia at alicia.harstad@ndsu.edu, or “Like” us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/steelecountyextension. NDSU is an equal opportunity institution.