



CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

PLANT INFORMATION FACT SHEET

# BOXELDER BUG

## Boxelder Bug (*Boisea trivittatus*)

During fall, many people notice an invasion of boxelder bugs into their homes, especially after a long, hot, and dry summer. The following information will help homeowners cope with this harmless insect.

## Identification

Boxelder bugs are approximately 1/2-inch long, elliptical, and black with red or orange markings on their wings. Nymphs, or immatures, closely resemble adults except they are smaller, redder, rounder, and wingless. Both nymphs and adults have six legs and two antennae.

## Life Cycle

Eggs of boxelder bugs are usually laid on female boxelder trees (*Acer negundo*) in the fall. However, they are sometimes laid on other maples (*Acer*), ash (*Fraxinus*), cherry, peach, plum (*Prunus*) and pear (*Pyrus*) trees. Overwintering adults begin to emerge and eggs begin to hatch in the spring as temperatures rise. Nymphs have sucking mouthparts and feed on the juices of trees until they develop into adults. In midsummer, they lay eggs for a second generation.

## Feeding

Adults feed on seeds and leaves of boxelder maple trees (*Acer negundo*) as well as others, including silver maples (*Acer saccharinum*). Occasionally, they can be found feeding on the fruit of apple and plum trees. Trees exhibit no considerable damage from feeding boxelder bugs.

## Hibernation

During the fall, adult boxelder bugs seek protected places to hibernate for the winter. They enter buildings through open doors, windows, cracks, and crevices. Other areas for hibernation include outbuildings, barns, trees, and bark crevices. Adults can fly up to two miles to find winter housing. While indoors, boxelder bugs go dormant behind curtains, on window sills and other out-of-the-way places. They feed only in the summer on specific plant material and do not feed while indoors. The only damage that occurs is when the insect is crushed and their internal fluids stain surfaces including fabric and walls.

## Control Recommendations

Because boxelder bugs cause no appreciable damage indoors or out, the use of chemical control is not necessary. Prevent boxelder bugs from entering indoors by placing screens on all windows and doors and sealing all other potential entry locations. The slight aggravation caused by invading insects can be dealt with simply by catching and releasing them outdoors. Catch them indoors by hand or vacuum. Any remaining boxelder bugs will attempt to return outdoors in the spring. Since boxelder bugs prefer to feed on the seeds of female boxelder trees, only male trees should be planted in the landscape.

Please contact Plant Information Service at (847) 835-0972 or [plantinfo@chicagobotanic.org](mailto:plantinfo@chicagobotanic.org) for current recommendations.



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