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A number of calls have come to the Extension Office about various insect pests that have started to look for warmer environments in our homes.

Before panicking and causing extra work and possible harm to our homes and loved ones, consider this information about boxelder bugs, millipedes, and centipedes.

Boxelder Bugs

Boxelder bugs are found in boxelder, maple and ash trees where they suck the juice out of plant leaves.

They can also be found in and near other plant material in the landscape as well.

As cool weather approaches, it is easy to notice boxelder bugs on the sides of buildings, and trying to find a warm place to survive the winter.

In the spring, the adults will emerge, with the female laying eggs on plant material. The eggs will usually hatch in 10 to 14 days to repeat the cycle.

Exclusion is one of the best strategies for controlling boxelder bugs in the home. Check foundations, siding, doorways and windows for cracks, damage and correct seals.

Replace weather stripping and caulking to help prevent the boxelders from coming into the home.

Spraying a band of residual insecticide such as cabaryl (Sevin), around the home will help reduce the population in the area.

Read and follow all label instructions for proper and safe application.

Hot, soapy water or insecticidal soap applied to the boxelder bugs are two non-chemical approaches that can be used as well.

If these pests do get inside a home, they do not damage food, furnishings, or bite. They may leave spots on walls or possibly stain curtains with their waste.

Many will try to find a hiding space that is not disturbed, including inside interior walls.

This partially explains why people may notice boxelder bugs showing up in the house in the dead of winter.

They simply emerged from their hiding spot in the home.

For random bugs in the home, the flyswatter or the vacuum is one of the best ways for control without introducing extra chemicals into the home.

In the case where a fogger is used, it is extremely important to read and follow all the application and safety steps on the product label.

Miss-application of insecticide in the home can lead to poisoning of humans and pets.

Millipedes and Centipedes

Millipedes and centipedes are invertebrates that are casually thrown in other insect pests as “bugs” due to their ability to invade and become a nuisance in homes as well. They are well known for their pairs of legs that help them move.

They can also mistakenly be called wireworms, which is the larval stage of a beetle that damages plant roots.

These creatures can be found under boards, rocks, organic matter and other debris.

They also live in top couple inches of the soil.

As the soil temperature and the temperature under the debris decreases, they will start looking for a warm, moist, environment to live in for the winter.

Damp home areas, including bathrooms, damp closets and basements are prime hiding areas since millipedes and centipedes need a moist environment to live in.

If large numbers are found, this could be a sign of a larger moisture or water problem in the home that may need to be investigated.

Reducing living environments around homes and buildings is a good place to start when trying to lower the number of millipedes and centipedes.

Remove extra rocks, bricks, mulch and other debris close to the home. Exclusion through tight door seals and sealed cracks in a home's foundation will also help keep millipedes and centipedes out of the home.

Applying a band of insecticide around the home about 10 feet in width will also help kill these pests as they try to enter the home.

Insecticides that contain Baygon, Ficam and Sevin can be used for this application. Read and follow all instructions and precautions for a safe application.

Once millipedes and centipedes enter a home, they usually die because they are not living in a moist-enough environment.

They may live longer in basements or areas of the house with extra moisture or higher humidity.

They do not cause problems with food, or furniture. They rarely bite humans. At worst, the bites resemble a bee sting.

Many of the millipedes and centipedes that are found in a home are usually dead because they have dried out, and have not found a moist environment to live in. The best way to remove these pests is to suck them up with a vacuum.

If you have any questions about nuisance boxelder bug, millipede or centipede control, please contact me at dlott2@unl.edu, by calling (308) 532-2683, or by contact your local University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Office. Have a great week!