

PestGazette

SUMMER 2008

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Ants in Your Plants?

Keep Odorous House Ants Away from Your Plants and Out of Your Home

Summer is the perfect time for ants to infest your home, especially after it rains. It's not uncommon to see large trails of workers entering through cracks or small openings into your home. These pests could be odorous house ants, named because of the undesirable odor (similar to rotten coconut) they give off when crushed. These ants are medium-sized, brown in color, and have huge colonies with multiple queens.

The ants you are seeing are most likely workers out looking for food. They often are found nesting in mulch beds, near sprinkler systems or under landscaping stones. They love to feed upon the sweet honeydew produced by aphids in trees

and shrubs in your yard, especially ornamental fruit trees and azaleas.

Odorous house ants move their nest sites frequently in response to disturbances, especially those caused by you trying to treat them on your own. Due to the fact that there are multiple queens, a phenomenon known as budding can occur when new colonies spring up in new areas. Whatever you do, do not try and treat these ants yourself! You need a pest professional who will treat the ants and prevent budding. Call us; we can help. In the meantime, pull the mulch back from around the perimeter of your home and have your fruit trees and azaleas treated for aphid infestations. ■

Call Today!
913-362-4399



Don't Get Chased by the Bald-Faced Hornet

Have you ever noticed a large gray wasp nest about the size of a football made of paper-like material hanging down from a tree in your yard? They can be quite a work of art and attractive to naturalists that collect them as one of nature's many beauties. If you looked closely, however, you would see the owners of this home, the bald-faced hornet workers, flying back and forth as they look for food on a summer's afternoon.

Bald-faced hornet nests are pretty recognizable, as are the hornets themselves. They are one of the few hornets with a white face (if you want to get close enough to take a look – however, this is not highly recommended!) These wasps are a pest that can really pack a punch when they sting you, especially when a whole colony
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The bald-faced hornet sting can pack a real punch! Do not attempt to remove them yourself. Call us if you spot these pests on your property; we can help.



Free Your Home of Foreign Grain Beetles

The foreign grain beetle is very small (about 1/16-inch long) and a reddish brown in coloration. These small beetles are strong fliers, and are sometimes confused with fruit flies or gnats. Foreign grain beetles normally exist outside as scavengers, feeding on plant and animal debris and their associated fungi. They frequently enter homes, and once indoors, are often seen around sinks, bathtubs, and other sources of moisture, such as plumbing leaks and condensation from pipes. Fortunately, foreign grain beetles do not bite and are harmless to people. They do not destroy furniture, clothing or other property.

Foreign grain beetles prefer grain that is old and moldy and are rarely found in sound, dry food products in the home. Most complaints about foreign grain beetles come from people living in new homes. These beetles are one of a group of beetles called “fungus beetles” that feed on the molds and fungi that grow on poorly seasoned lumber or wet plaster and wall boards. When new homes are built, especially if built during spring rains, when the house is finally closed up, this damp wood is often covered with molds or mildew which attracts these beetles. The beetles may also be attracted to accumulations of sawdust, which often occur behind walls as a by-product of construction.

Adults usually become a problem in late summer when they move out of wall voids and are attracted to windows and lights. Control is best accomplished by drying out the wood and/or eliminating the moisture source. Once the relative humidity falls below 60 percent, foreign grain beetles die and

disappear on their own. Drying can be enhanced by increasing the home’s ventilation. But you may also need the assistance of a pest professional, such as us. Control can be achieved by having our technician locate the infested wall areas or source of dampness (usually next to where the beetles are most abundant) and treating these areas with appropriately labeled materials. If you notice foreign grain beetles in your home, be sure to give us a call! ■



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Bald-faced hornets are extremely protective of their nests and will sting repeatedly if disturbed.

Bald-Faced Hornets (continued)

is alarmed by would-be invaders. Do not attempt to remove these wasps or their nests yourself! We have the knowledge and experience, and also the proper personal protective equipment to do this correctly and safely. Keep in mind that bald-faced hornets are extremely protective of their nests and

will sting repeatedly if disturbed. The main area of the body that bald-faced hornets attack on humans is the facial area, thus making them very dangerous to have around. Please contact us, your pest professional experts, if you spot one of these nests forming in or around your home or yard. ■



Opossums have a long snout and a mouth full of sharp teeth. They can attack and bite if cornered or disturbed. Because they often hang out around your garbage bins and dumpsters, those teeth can pick up bacterial pathogens from the spoiled and decaying foods they eat.

Call us if you think you have an opossum nesting on your property.

Awesome Opossums

Opossums are creatures of the night, so unless you are a creature of the night as well you may rarely see one. They are one of the only marsupials (mammals with a pouch for the development of the young) in the new world, and have not changed their form much since these creatures first appeared on earth.

Opossums are not what most people would call “attractive.” They have bodies about the size of a large cat and soft grayish white fur and a long scaly tail. They have a long snout and a mouth full of sharp teeth with which they can attack and bite if cornered or disturbed. Because they often hang out around your garbage bins and dumpsters, those teeth can pick up some bacterial pathogens, like hepatitis, e. coli, salmonella, etc. from the spoiled and decaying foods that they sometimes rummage through and eat. Fortunately, thanks to their lower blood temperature, rabies is almost unknown in opossums. Interestingly, opossums have a remarkably robust immune system, and are immune to the venom of rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, and other pit vipers snakes.

They have a very broad diet. Their diet mainly consists of carrion and many individual opossums are killed on the highway when scavenging for road kill. They are also known to eat insects, frogs, birds, snakes, small mammals, and earthworms. Some of their favorite foods are fruits and they are known to eat apples and persimmons. The Virginia opossum is the original animal named “opossum.” Colloquially, the Virginia opossum is frequently called simply “possum.”

Males are typically somewhat larger than females. Female opossums often give birth to very large numbers of young, and

as many as 15 young can attach to a teat within the pouch, and survive. The young are weaned between 70 and 125 days, when they detach from the teat and leave the pouch. The opossum lifespan is unusually short for a mammal of its size, usually only two to four years. When threatened or harmed, they will “play possum,” mimicking the appearance and smell of a sick or dead animal. The lips are drawn back, teeth are bared, saliva foams around the mouth, and a foul-smelling fluid is secreted from the anal glands. The physiological response is involuntary, rather than a conscious act. Their stiff, curled form can be prodded, turned over, and even carried away. Many injured opossums have been killed by well-meaning people who find a catatonic animal and assume the worst.

The opossum uses its tail as a brace and a fifth limb when climbing. The tail is occasionally used as a grip to carry bunches of leaves or bedding materials to the nest. A mother will sometimes carry her young upon her back, where they will cling tightly even when she is climbing or running. Opossums are usually solitary and nomadic, staying in one area as long as food and water are easily available. Though they will temporarily occupy abandoned burrows, they do not dig or put much effort into building their own. As nocturnal animals, they favor dark, secure areas. These areas may be above or below ground, and quite frequently, they are within your home, yard, basement, crawl space, attic, or backyard shed. Because you may not realize which animal you are dealing with, call our office to have us inspect and identify who it is that is nesting in your home or yard. We have experts who can help you to rid your opossum problem. ■



Beware of Bed Bugs When You Travel

Until recently, you may have thought bed bugs were just a myth. We've all heard the old nursery rhyme, "*Sleep tight; don't let the bed bugs bite.*" We wish we could tell you that it was only a rhyme or a myth, but bed bugs are in the news almost daily now for a reason. Bed bugs have recently experienced a resurgence and have become a real nuisance for hotels, college dorms, cruise ships, hospitals, nursing homes, homes and apartments. They've even been found on public transportation, such as buses, commuter trains and airplanes. And, they've been found in every class of hotel from the shady to the most luxurious. (They are often found in resort areas frequented by tourists.)

Adult bed bugs are very small, about the size of a tick. In fact, they are often mistaken for ticks or small cockroaches, so we do not always get a call for an infestation as soon as we might like. It is important to call a pest professional right away

if you suspect bed bugs so that we can begin treatment immediately. Bed bugs are quite prolific and multiply rapidly. A bed bug infestation requires the assistance of a pest professional and is not something a homeowner can rid on their own. That's why you have us. We have been specially trained to inspect a room thoroughly for the presence of bed bugs and to target treat the sites where they are located.

If there is any good news about bed bugs, it is this. To date, there has been no disease transmission concerns associated with the blood feeding nature of the bed bug. Some people have reactions to the saliva of the bite of the bed bug, not unlike a bee sting or spider bite reaction. Of course, knowing something is feeding upon you at night does not help one sleep better. If you should have any questions about bed bugs, please feel free to call us, your pest professionals. ■



Bed bugs are prolific and multiply rapidly. If you suspect a bed bug infestation in your home, contact us immediately!

photo credit: Dr. Gary Alpert, Harvard Univ.

Once established in a home, bed bugs are difficult to remove. Treatments can be time, labor and material intensive to truly rid the home of all bed bugs present. The best offense is a strong defense. When you travel, keep these pointers in mind to reduce the risk of your bringing bed bugs home with you:



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- 1 When checking into a hotel, inspect your room thoroughly for bed bugs. Look closely for them (or their signs: blood spots) in or behind the headboard of the bed, over the bed, in, on or behind the picture hanging above the bed board, in the seams of the mattress and box springs. (Bed bugs feed upon human blood at night and are somewhat messy leaving obvious stains behind.)
- 2 Inspect the valet stand or luggage rack thoroughly around the fabric seams to see that there are no bed bugs; after passing your inspection, place your suitcase on the stand and keep it there the entire visit; do not let the suitcase sit on the floor.
- 3 Move your bed away from the wall of the room, and do not let linens touch the floor.
- 4 Check the hangers and rack in the closet before hanging your clothes there.
- 5 Check nightstands and dresser drawers before placing personal items on or inside.
- 6 If you should find bed bugs present, please alert the hotel management that this is the case and that you would like to be moved to another room. Only by informing the management of the bed bugs can they begin to tackle their problem. Hotels are now very up on this issue and will work with you to make your stay pleasant.
- 7 When you return home, unload your suitcase in the garage or out on the porch or patio.
- 8 Check your suitcase and other luggage thoroughly (inside and out) for any signs of bed bug hitchhikers that may have come with you.
- 9 If you should accidentally bring bed bugs home with you, contact us immediately to help rid your home of them.