McKINZIE PEST CONTROL
A McKINZIE INC. COMPANY
MEMBER NATIONAL PEST CONTROL ASSOCIATION
HEADED BY AN ENTOMOLOGIST

SEPT/OCTOBER 2009
Vol. 21 No. 5

The Pest Bulletin

PRSRT STD
US Postage
PAID
PERMIT NO 496
Berkeley, CA

www.pest-free.net
209 Commercial • Emporia, KS 66801• (620) 342-4222
1129 Hayes Dr • Manhattan, KS 66502 • (785) 776-6063

Time for Fall Invaders!

Fall is a busy time for pests as mice, rats, and a wide variety of insects invade homes, searching for a place to spend the winter.

In the fall many pests by instinct search for a dry, warm crevice or cavity such as a hallowed out tree stump or old animal burrow, a wood or rock pile, or underneath loose bark. To pests, our homes and other buildings look very similar to these natural sites. By instinct they crawl deep into cracks and holes in our foundations, walls and roofs, and around the edges of loose-fitting doors and windows.

Often the insect pests crawl in and then later become confused by the lights and warmth further indoors. Waking up prematurely from their winter stupor and thinking it's already spring, they start crawling towards lighted, warm areas—which means they often head further indoors, right into our living areas, rather than outdoors.

Common fall invaders that can cause problems include the new *Asian lady beetles* and *brown marmorated stink bugs, boxelder bugs, crickets, cluster flies, face flies,* and many other *bugs* and *beetles*. In addition, larger pests like *rats* and *mice* also prefer the warmth and dryness provided by man-made structures, and some kinds of *ants* may move their entire colony indoors.

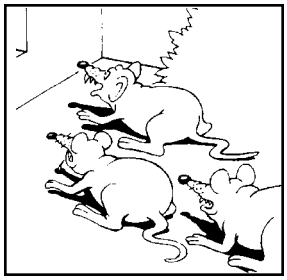
A few insects indoors can be simply vacuumed up. If you have larger numbers, or a history of pest issues in past winters, call us now to schedule special preventative treatments. Depending on the pests involved, these preventative treatments are often done in early fall.

Pest Prevention Tip of the Month

Before you bring houseplants into the home, check them to make sure they are not carrying any unwanted 'hitch-hikers'. Some pests may be feeding on the plant itself, and others—like ants, sowbugs, and earwigs—may be hiding in the soil.

Oh Rats! Oh Mice!!

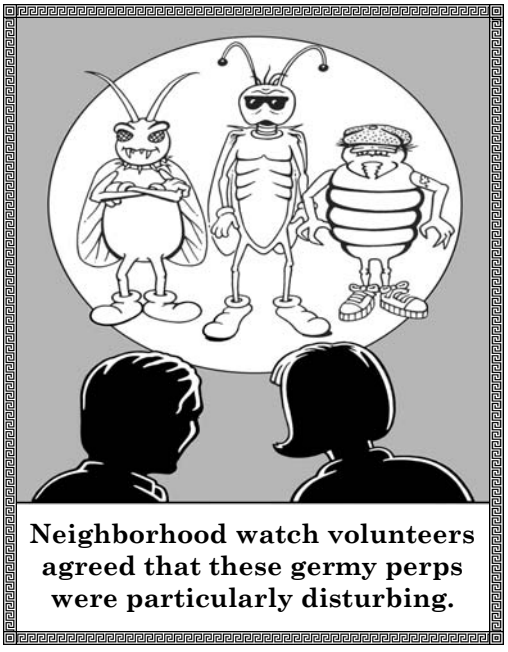
As the weather starts to cool during the fall months, rats and mice start moving indoors in larger numbers, looking for food and dry, protected shelter. We receive calls for rodent control throughout the year, but rats and mice cause far more problems now and during the months ahead than at any other time. Even homes and businesses that are normally rodent-free can start having problems.



Rats and mice *eat and contaminate a good deal of stored food* with their urine, numerous droppings, and the hairs they shed. They also *damage property* by chewing and digging. In addition, about 25 percent of all fires of unknown causes are due to rats and mice gnawing on electrical wires. House fires tend to occur most frequently in autumn when rats and mice move indoors to seek shelter.

Rats and mice also transmit a wide variety of diseases. More than 200 species of *disease-causing microorganisms* (including those causing salmonella food poisoning, murine typhus, Hantavirus, and plague), plus *parasitic worms* (such as those that cause trichinosis) are associated with rats and mice. Insects and mites associated with rodents include *blood-sucking fleas, ticks, mites, lice,* and *bed bugs*. These blood-sucking pests are an important means by which many disease-causing organisms are transmitted from rats to people and our pets.

Not all mice and rats are infected with all 200 diseases, but the fact that they do carry some and can transmit them to our loved ones and pets is reason enough to call us and have us control these common fall pests.



Neighborhood watch volunteers agreed that these germy perps were particularly disturbing.

Thank you for your business and referrals!

Another Exploding Apartment

An entire apartment complex was condemned because of an explosion that resulted when one tenant tried to do his own pest control. The tenant had set off *10 cans of insecticide fogger,* far too many for the size of the apartment, in a misguided attempt to control a cockroach infestation he says the landlord ignored. This excessive amount resulted in a highly flammable cloud of insecticide that was probably ignited by an electrical spark from the refrigerator.

The resulting explosion was so strong that it blew out some of the apartment complex's load-bearing walls, forcing the tenant and everyone else living in the complex to evacuate. Fortunately no one was injured.

Explosions of this kind happen many times every year in this country from well-meaning but ill-informed do-it-yourselfers. A further irony is that even the very costly explosion usually doesn't kill all the cockroaches. Call us if you have pests—our treatments are safer, greener and better for the environment, and much more effective!

New Giant Plant Eats Rodents!

A carnivorous plant was recently discovered that is so large that it lures not just insects to their death, but mice and rats as well. The pitcher plant, *Nepenthes attenboroughii*, was discovered on top of Mount Victoria, a remote mountain in Palawan, Philippines, and reported in the *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society*.

The deadly pitchers themselves, similar in shape to pitchers of Venus flytraps, are massive in comparison. Each pitcher can hold up to a *half gallon of liquid* and is up to *1 foot tall.* Along the lips of the trap they secrete a sweet nectar that helps lure unsuspecting prey. Once a victim has fallen in and drowns, enzymes and acids in the liquid break down the carcass and the plants use the dissolved nutrients. This allows the plants to thrive on very nutrient-poor soil.

Could a carnivorous plant of this size be used to control mouse and rat populations, perhaps in a greenhouse that mimics the climate it grows in? Unfortunately, no. It is still unknown what would happen if one of our large pound-size adult rats fell into one of these traps. It's possible they would be able to rip apart the trap and escape. Finally, these plants only catch mice and rats occasionally—not quickly enough to control a breeding population.

Your Questions Answered

Q. ***Why are some bugs called "kissing bugs"?***

A. *Triatoma* bugs, also called conenose bugs, are like bed bugs in that they come out at night and feed on the blood of humans and animals. Although they may bite any exposed skin of the body, their mouthparts are weak so they often choose the areas with the thinnest skin. *Lips* and *eyelids* are not only thin, they are usually exposed. This results in their being frequently bitten (yuck!)—hence the name "kissing bugs".

We have a few species of kissing bugs which bite people in this country, but these pests are more commonly found from Mexico to South America, where they also transmit Chagas disease. Fortunately, this serious disease is extremely rare in the United States.

A Mild Winter?

People have often tried to use insects to determine weather conditions. One widespread tradition has it that you can tell how severe winter will be by the width of the reddish-brown band around the middle of the woolly bear caterpillar. According to this belief, a short middle band indicates a longer and more severe winter is coming.

Is this a myth, or a good indicator? One scientist correlated band width with weather conditions between 1947 and 1951 and found that the caterpillar predicted weather more accurately than some professional meteorologists. However, this could have been because long range weather predictions at that time were even less accurate than today. In a more recent study, long range computer forecasts were more accurate than the woolly bear. Another study showed that band size is determined by what the caterpillar has eaten, and has nothing to do with the weather.

So taking all these studies together, the banding of the woolly bear caterpillar is not an accurate forecaster of winter weather.

Pest Trivia

Orb weaving **spiders** produce up to seven chemically distinct kinds of silk for their webs. Each kind of silk strand serves a different purpose, and some are not sticky, especially the spokes of the web. It's on those non-sticky strands that the resident spider spends most of its time.

Researchers recently collected **head lice** from 1,000 year old Peruvian mummies. To their surprise, they were able to collect more than *400* head lice from one mummy, and *500* from another! Obviously, these people suffered greatly from severe head lice infestations. It is speculated that the very high louse numbers were a result of the elaborate hair braids worn by these people. The braids made regular combing impossible and created a perfect haven for the tiny parasites.