

Stink bugs



Stink bugs are active throughout all of the United States. Generally found in the garden, stink bugs will find their way into homes and structures when fall evenings start to turn cold. They acquired their name from a natural defense they have which is to release a smell that "stinks". This smell enables them to avoid getting eaten by several species of birds and lizards. If you have ever handled a stink bug you probably know the smell! They will release it onto most any surface they land and it will last a long time. This odor is one of the main reasons they will return year after year to any structure which is used as a hibernating den.

If your home starts to harbor hibernating stink bugs it is best you get rid of them before the infestation gets out of control. This article will help detail some basic biology about stink bugs and then offer practical solutions you can apply to stop infestations before they get to that level. Stink bugs are in the family of insects known as pentatomidae. There are hundreds of subspecies located around the world and the United States has several which are active in and around the home.

Generally thought of as an agricultural pest, stink bugs will readily take up residence around any garden or landscape rich with plants and flowers. Stink bugs have a shield shaped body which is very wide and measure about 1/2" long. The most common species range in color from green to brown. One species is a bright red and black. Not only can they emit an odor which "stinks" but many people have an allergic reaction to this secretion so it is best to leave them alone.

Stink bugs hibernate during cold winter months and will emerge in the spring as temperatures rise. Adults mate in the spring and females will lay eggs on plants. These eggs will be laid in groups and are not plant specific. Young will go through 5 stages to reach adulthood and this will occur in about three months. During this time they will feed on just about anything available. Plant juices like honeydew seem to be their choice of food but most will readily feed on tomatoes, beans, and any type of fruit, corn, peppers or cabbage.



Stink bugs have never been targeted as a destructive pest because they are controlled by all the other spraying being done for other pests. However, if left unchecked, they can cause all kinds of damage to any garden. Most damage occurs to juicy vegetables and fruit once the protective skin is broken. Since young take about three months to mature they are generally old enough to mate in the beginning of summer and so another batch will emerge to reach adulthood before the end of the year. Stink bugs don't like it too hot and will migrate north out of the south. However, the longer growing season of the south enables them to reproduce better and longer during the year so the South harbors the highest populations.



Stink bugs are hardy and will live a few years so adults which find themselves too far north will hibernate on buildings which help to provide some warmth. Southern populations may remain active all year if a mild winter keeps temperatures moderate but if it gets too cold, they too, will move indoors. Stink bugs may be predators of other insects and several species seem to be predatory as long as local populations of food are prevalent. However, they will readily resort to plants, fruits and vegetables if no other food is around.

Don't be misled into thinking any stink bug is a good bug. This type of thought has gotten many people in trouble. A few around the garden won't do a lot of harm. However, if you have them eating the very produce you are trying to grow, the damage they do will quickly ruin all your effort. Stink bugs are not efficient when they eat. They will generally move about from fruit to fruit ruining several in any one day. They are also attracted to light and will find their way into homes during the long summer nights when porch and deck lights are on and doors are being opened and closed. This summertime pattern will continue throughout the season until cooler nights and shorter days force the adults to seek harborage. Structures like homes are warm and provide adequate shelter from rain, cold and other elements.

Stink bugs will work their way under siding, into soffits, around window and door frames, under roof shingles and into any crawl space or attic vent which has openings small enough to fit them. Once inside the home they will go into a state of suspended animation where they wait for winter to pass. However, the warmth inside the home will generally attract them and many will find their way inside. Once inside the home you will expect to have them becoming active all through the winter. Try not to handle them and be careful if you do - not only will they release that nasty smell but many species are able to inflict a nasty bite!