

It's Going to Be A Buggy Year

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If you don't like insects, you aren't going to like what I have to say. It has been an insect filled summer and it's not getting any better anytime soon. Unfortunately there is nothing we can do to stop that, but there are some things you can do to minimize their impact on your yard, garden and house.

First of all how did we get here? Quite simply, the weather. When it started raining late summer of last year we had a mini population explosion of insects. They laid a lot of eggs that then hatched this spring or the adults simply overwintered. Either way, we headed into this growing season with a lot of insects on the horizon. When we have high rainfall, even flooding rainfall, it actually makes very good environmental conditions for insect survival. Hot dry conditions, while favoring a few insects, cause higher mortality for most insect species. Cooler, humid, rainy conditions are great conditions for insect survival and development.

Cool, humid, rainy weather creates a lot of plant growth and also a lot of decaying organic matter. Both are food for a lot of insects. Many of these insects then become food for other insects and spiders. So those species thrive and increase as well. We have a busy cycle of insect development going on with no end in sight until a good hard freeze!

Some of these life cycles started last year. Any of the many species of insects that we call May beetles, June bugs, scarab beetles or whatever are abundant this summer. The first life stage of these insects is underground as what we call "grubs". For most species those eggs were laid last year, mid to late summer. This was after it started to rain so they had lots of food to eat and grow and survive!

To many folk's amazement, the winter was also very good for survival of most insect species. When it gets cold and stays cold through the winter, the insects survive better as they don't use up internal food supplies going in and out of dormancy. To maximize death of insects over winter you need a few days of very warm weather followed by a cold spell and then repeat this numerous times through the winter. Just getting cold and staying cold doesn't really make an impact on overwintering populations.

As we start to have hotter and drier, more typical Kansas summer weather conditions, many of these insects are looking for places to escape and they start coming inside, which isn't always best for their survival, but they don't care. As we move into cooler weather in September and October this will intensify even more. These accidental invaders are what really drive many homeowners to frustration.

To start with, make sure that doors and windows fit tight and are kept closed. Many insects wander right on in when we enter and exit buildings, and we're totally unaware of it. Treat inside thresholds and utility entrances to buildings with anything labeled as a home pest insect control product. Around the outside of the house spray a barrier with just about any lawn and garden pesticide labeled for "nuisance pests." These likely need to be reapplied every four to six weeks until freezing weather. Keep vegetation mowed down around houses, gardens and buildings. Tall, rank vegetation provides lots of cover and protection for insects. It's easier to keep insects out of buildings than to control them once they get inside. And for goodness sakes don't rely on things like ultrasound devices or hedge balls. In spite of numerous testimonials, they don't work. It's going to be a buggy rest of the summer. Take steps to keep them out of your house but don't overly fret over them!