



Autumn Invaders & Overwintering Pests



Figure 1. Paper wasps.



Figure 2. Multicolored Asian lady beetles.

It seems that every year, from late autumn through early spring, when the sun comes out and raises the outside temperature into the upper 40's (°F) or so, we get calls from folks who report (with some degree of consternation) the appearance of insect activity indoors. These homeowners discover a variety of flying and crawling insects around windows and indoor lighting and wonder where the *(bleep!)* they came from. These unwanted guests include paper wasps (Fig 1), lady beetles (Fig. 2), cluster flies (Fig 3), leaf-footed bugs (Fig. 4) and boxelder bugs (Fig. 5).



Figure 3. Cluster fly



Figure 4. Leaf-footed bug



Figure 5. Boxelder bug

If we could go back in time to the previous September, and could watch carefully the outside of the house, we would notice a variety of insects flying to- and landing on the sun-warmed structural surfaces and then



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disappearing into crevices. They would be entering the structural voids of our chimney casings, attics and exterior walls by way of 1/5 to 1/4 inch gaps at structural junctures:

- Siding seams and corner molding or trim
- Roof to roof flashing
- Wood siding to masonry
- Loose door and window trim
- Unscreened ridge, hat, gable and soffit vents
- Dormer corners
- Brick veneer to stucco or other external sheathing
- Skylight casings and flashing
- Chimney attachment and crown flashing
- Utility penetrations

Unfortunately, once these insects enter the structural voids of our residences, it is nearly impossible to eliminate them. They remain in a state of cold-induced dormancy until the temperature rises to their activity threshold (upper 40's to lower 60's °F), at which point they begin to look for ways of escaping their overwintering sites. Often these insects mistakenly make their way into our well-lighted and warm living spaces through gaps in ceiling / canister light fixtures, skylight casings, exhaust fan housings, tongue and groove woodwork junctures, heat duct penetrations, fire place casements, masonry joints and similar spaces. In most cases, so many of these structural features are present in a residence that not all of them can be accessed and excluded to prevent pest entry.

One might ask, "Why not inject insecticide into the structural voids where these insects are overwintering? Won't that stop the problem?" The answer is, *Yes and no*. With painstaking efforts, we can kill some of the overwintering insects in structural voids using insecticide aerosol and dust formulations; however, there is no way to get treatment into all of the sites occupied by these pests. Furthermore, there is a risk that the dead bodies of the wasps, flies, beetles and other bugs that we kill will become food for secondary pests, such as dermestid (carpet and cabinet) beetles and certain anobiid beetles at some point in the future. Then the secondary pests become an indoor issue months or years later on.

By far the best approach to controlling autumn invaders and overwintering insects is a preventative approach. Our technicians are successful in combating such pests by applying a residual liquid insecticide to strategic

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exterior structural features of residences (and commercial buildings) in late August or early September. Such a preventative treatment can be arranged months ahead of time by scheduling a thorough exterior application through the customer care department here at Varmet Guard early in the year.

A related issue with respect to cold season insect pest activity indoors relates to our habit of bringing firewood indoors and not burning it within a day or two. It certainly is convenient to have our firewood stacked up against the house, nice and convenient for those cold, snowy days. Better yet, we tend to carry several logs into the house and keep them stacked close to the fireplace, ready to fuel those winter evening fires. However, inside those remaining logs on the hearth, warming up to room temperature, are a variety of overwintering insects that have been tricked into thinking it's springtime. You have brought a "Trojan Horse" of sorts into your domicile. Within days or weeks you may be stunned to see several large carpenter ants (Fig. 6) and bizarre long-horned beetles (Fig. 7) crawling around the family room. Furthermore, there may be cluster flies and blue or green blow flies buzzing around the windows. At that point you might be lamenting, "Why didn't I burn up those logs or put them back outside while I had the opportunity?" Why not take the next logical step and relocate the whole woodpile some distance away from the house. That way you can help keep warm weather populations of ants, termites, earwigs and spiders away from your house.



Figure 6. Carpenter ant



Figure 7. Longhorned beetle