



**Cornell University**  
**Cooperative Extension**  
**Columbia County**

479 Rte. 66  
Hudson, NY 12534-9704  
tel. 518.828.3346  
fax. 518.828.3069  
[www.cce.cornell.edu/columbia/columbia.html](http://www.cce.cornell.edu/columbia/columbia.html)

## UNWELCOME FALL HOUSE GUESTS

By: Joel W. Allen, Extension Educator  
CCE of Columbia County

The insects are on the move again; the insects that like to move into our homes for the winter, that is. Boxelder bugs, Western conifer seed bugs, cluster flies, sweet and grease ants, and even ladybird (ladybugs) beetles are being found nearly every where throughout the county and many will find their way into our homes, attics, walls, and crawl spaces for the winter months ahead. And yes, it might not be all that uncommon for some of us to be experiencing several or all of the above all at the same time.

As I have mentioned before, tightening up your home, sealing all cracks and crevices, will not only reduce heat and energy loss, it will also reduce the number of critters that can move in. There are very few products available to us over-the-counter for dealing with any of these pests. There are some procedures that a commercial pest control operator (PCO/exterminator) could use that might help prevent the movement of cluster flies, for example, into your home, but that procedure has a very specific time period in which it will work - mid August through mid-September, so it is too late for that. Homeowners can consider using household aerosol sprays available over-the-counter from hardware, garden center, and even grocery stores. These are well labeled for specific pests so read the label for the pest you are trying to manage and the location of that pest in the home before making the purchase. Most of these aerosol products contain pyrethrum-based insecticides which carry the least-toxic (caution) warning. Rather than use a pesticide, however, I'd like to recommend you learn more about the insect (s) you are being bothered by and practice sanitation and mechanical methods of dealing with them, if even necessary.

For example, none of the pests I have mentioned above, will cause any damage or injury in the home. While they may be a nuisance and bother residents in the home, they really don't feed on anything in the home or even mate and reproduce. They are just escaping the cold outside, just like our snowbirds who travel south for the winter. They will settle into the attics, crawlspaces, walls, and cellars to spend the winter. Now if they locate in an area where there is warm air escaping from the living quarters, than they could remain active pretty much all winter. In this case, you'll need to search out where they are located and go after them with a vacuum cleaner or broom. Sweeping them up and putting them outdoors or crushing them and sending them down the drain are easy management methods.

The ladybird beetle, most likely the Asian Ladybeetle, is actually a beneficial insect, feeding on various outdoor insects such as aphids. If you have a home greenhouse or lots of houseplants, then keep the ladybeetles there since they will continue to rid your plants of mites and aphids. Of course, once this food supply is gone, they'll begin to wander again, but they don't feed on stuff in our cupboards. Again, sweep them up and let them go outdoors. They will seek cover under the shrubs and in the mulch layer.

Sweet and grease ants can be a nuisance and if active all winter, they will seek out a food supply in  
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our food storage and preparation areas. Ants don't really hibernate, although, in the cold, they will go dormant. So in the home, if they settle near a warm space, they will remain active. In this case, you might want to use ant baits randomly placed where you see ants. And change these according to the label. These are not actual traps - won't find dead ants around them. But rather, the ants that travel into the baits will take the poison bait on their body back to the colony where the other ants will come in contact with it. These baits do work and most are boric acid-based, but it may take several weeks or even months to eliminate the colony. Meanwhile, do what you can to eliminate their food supply by keeping everything covered and sealed and all counters, floors, and cupboard shelves clean. Remember however, ants will continue to search out a food supply which may be in rooms in which you never thought you kept any food – don't forget the kid's rooms where crumbs can accumulate, for example.

We have fact sheets on all of the above listed household pests. Just give us a call and describe the pest you are experiencing. I'll bet we can identify it for you over the phone and then send you the appropriate fact sheet (s). Again, don't panic when you see these critters. Rather set out to learn what they are and what you can and should do about them. Some, like the cluster fly, you may decide to tolerate for the winter months.

More gardening and household pests questions can be addressed to the Master Gardener volunteers of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia County by phone at (518) 828-3346, or via email at [columbia@cornell.edu](mailto:columbia@cornell.edu)