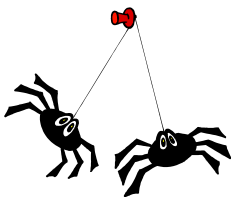


Rambling prose!



In mid-winter it is difficult to come up with new ideas to talk about insects, as most of them are hibernating, in the pupal stage or have died from the cold. I thought I would take this opportunity to review some of the experiences the Insect Committee had over the last year.

One of the most unusual insects that we were asked to identify turned out to be a Cossid moth larva. The caterpillar is sometimes called a carpenter worm, since it spends the entire larval stage boring into the healthy wood of trees. Like a termite, it actually subsists on the wood of the plant. The worm looks very much like a beetle grub and can travel backward or forward with equal dexterity. The adult moth is fairly large, mottled gray, with a 3 inch wing-span. These are not commonly seen moths, but occasionally come to lights at night. I was attempting to raise the caterpillar to adulthood as a specimen for our collection, but the little bugger escaped from the container I had him in in the house. I think he is now in my bookshelf eating our recipe books (How appropriate that he ended up in that section!).



And, of course, The spiders!, the spiders!!!! I don't know why everyone has been so panicked about spiders over the last few years, but we got several spiders in for identification every week! One thing we did note this last year is that there were a greater number of Hobo spiders brought in to the office than the last couple of years. I think that the dry spring and fall had something to do with the success rate of these critters. At any rate, clients were finding a lot more inside their houses. One of the cousins of the Hobo, a giant house spider, was brought in by a client. It was HUGE by spider standards. She said she went into the bathroom in the middle of the night, turned on the light and there it was in the sink bowl! As an arachnophobic person, I don't think I would have been so nonchalant about capturing it to bring it to the office. I would have squished the sucker!

The number of boxelder bugs and ladybird beetles did not seem to be as numerous at our house this year. Did you have that same experience? Could have been the weather, I guess. Also, the number of brown predatory stink bugs seemed to be on the increase this last year. They love to feed on caterpillars, and for one like me who likes to raise moth caterpillars, it was real hard on my stock.

We did not have many carpenter ants brought in this year. Perhaps we are doing a better job of educating the public about observing for these pests.

Finally, I want to thank all of you Master Gardeners™ for the support and assistance in making our insect collection and the Insect committee a success. Thanks to all on the committee members for your time and invaluable efforts for helping our clients! We'll see what the new year brings to our Extension Office doors from the insect world. Have a Happy New Year!