

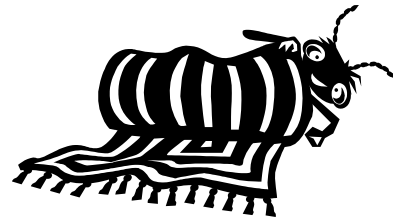
Itsy, bitsy, teeny weeny...

Most of the specimens of insects that are brought into the Extension Office for identification are fairly large and can easily be identified using the naked eye. Some, however, are extremely small and require a hand lens or dissecting scope to see details of identifying characteristics. This presents a challenge to the Master Gardener on duty, as well as to the Insect Committee.

Let's review some of the more common wee insects that are brought to us by clients.

Collembola, or springtails are tiny insects (about 1/16 inch long) with a forked structure on their rear ends that they use to "spring" through the air. They are quite difficult to look at alive as they tend to disappear from view with their long jumps. These critters like moist areas outside, or under sinks and water faucets inside the house. Laundry rooms, especially if in a basement or garage are also favorites. They really aren't a problem, but if in large numbers, they create a nuisance.

Carpet beetles (about 1/8") and their larvae (about 1/4") are brought in quite frequently. The beetle itself is roundish, and mottled in red, black and yellow. The larva is worm-like with a row of hair encircling each segment. They feed on hair (wool), dried foods, feathers and other protein rich substances. Oriental rugs are especially susceptible to their ravages.



Flour beetles, grain beetles and drugstore beetles are usually brought into a person's house from stored foods that have been contaminated at the store. They are not easily seen until they reproduce in large numbers and the cereal or flour seems to be crawling with them. They are all minute (about 1/16") and brown or reddish in color. A good way to keep them out of the house is to place new bags of flour or cereals in the freezer for a few days. This kills adults, larvae, pupae and eggs.

Mites can be a problem on indoor plants. The mites are usually so small as to go undetected until the plant begins to show signs of "bug stress". Most mites make fine webs underneath the leaves of plants as they suck the juices out. Webbing is a good diagnostic indicator for MG,s. Some mites actually dig into the leaves of plants and live inside a hollowed out area of the mesophyll. Systemic poisons work well on these mites.

All this information seems to indicate bleak situations, but there is one tiny insect that actually is a big help to gardeners. That is the minute pirate bug. As its name indicates, it is very small, but makes up for its size by being a predator of other small, destructive insects.

Many of the teeny insects go unseen by most people until they become a pest in one way or another. There are hundreds of species out there, proving "It's a small world after all".

