

March Madness



It's that time of year again! Calls will be coming into the MG office with clients wondering what to do about boxelder bugs covering their house or getting inside. My advice of "leave them alone and they will soon go home", or vacuum them up if they are inside seems to satisfy most of the callers. The bugs are simply getting ready to mate, lay eggs and then seemingly disappear from the landscape for the summer. Many callers are also concerned about the ladybird beetles that swarm about this time of the

year. Same advice! Actually, the ladybirds are simply coming out of hibernation "en masse" and are looking for suitable places to lay eggs and perpetuate the species. Since both the boxelders and the ladybirds are distasteful to predators, they can go about their March madness relatively undisturbed.

The slugs that have been hibernating all winter also begin to appear. Perhaps you have seen a pair mating in a slimy mass in your gardens or under logs and rocks. The slugs are hermaphroditic, which means they have both male and female parts. Therefore, a pair can lay twice as many eggs as if they were simply a male or female. You probably have seen the eggs under wood or rocks in your garden. They look like tiny translucent pearls and are about the size of BB's. They are laid in masses of about one hundred and hatch in a short time as miniature ravenous eating machines.

On warm days you may see tiny black spiders running to and fro in your yard. These are a species of wolf spider that does not spin a web, but rather searches for and runs down its prey. As the days get longer and warmer, you might see some of the spiders with little white egg sacs. The females carry these egg sacs with their spinnerets until the eggs hatch. The hatchlings climb on the mother and are literally "taken for a ride" until they are big enough to be able to survive on their own.

Carpenter ants are now sending out scouts looking for food or suitable places to begin satellite colonies. Soon the winged reproductives will be swarming out of their nests to mate and find available wood to start new colonies. Termites are also beginning to swarm, and as they do so, the birds are ready and waiting for some winged protein to add to their meager wintertime diets.

Moles, voles and mice are becoming active, and are eagerly awaiting the surge of a fresh food supply. March madness is catching on with all the creatures in our area. The bustling activities of summer are beginning anew, creating new challenges for us as Master Gardeners. Both pests and beneficials give us purpose for tending to our gardening pleasures in spring. The March madness is simply a prelude to the renewal of the natural world around us in summer in our great Northwest.

