



“Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep!”

It's October, and most insects and other arthropods are preparing to spend the winter in a quiescent slumber state. Some, like the silver spotted tiger moth larvae, will still feed during the winter on fir needles, but many other species will spend the cooler months hibernating. We all know the boxelder bugs will be targeting our houses for their version of the Woodstock Folk Festival gathering (remember that huge mass of people in the 60's?). They are simply looking for a place to sleep for the winter and will then emerge next spring as a secondary scourge on people's houses.

Ladybird beetles will do almost the same thing as the boxelder bugs, massing up in a den for the winter. Ladybirds tend to go to higher elevations, if they can, to avoid being drowned out with the persistent winter rains. In spring, they fly down from the upland regions and will again feed on our garden's aphid population. It's rather a search and destroy mission they are on when they awake in spring.

Most moth and butterfly larvae have formed cocoons and pupae to endure the cool, wet months. The larvae of our native giant silk moths, the Polyphemus and Ceanothus moths, have made sturdy silken cocoons in which the larvae transform into the resting stage or pupa. Next May or June, the adults will emerge from the cocoons and again grace our night sky. The naked pupae of butterflies are designed to withstand the cold and wet of the winter also.

Beetle larvae have become pupae in underground or wooden chambers and will emerge as adults next spring either as beneficials that feed on injurious insects, or as our enemies that consume our garden bounty. Some beetles actually emerge as adults in the fall of the year. One such is the rain beetle, which is an October emergent. The adult is a robust, one inch long, brown beetle. This species spends its summer as a larva that feeds on deer and elk poop, then pupates and emerges as the rains begin in October. Who would have guessed how it got its common name of “rain beetle”?

Many spiders die before winter sets in. But, if that happens, they will lay eggs in silken egg cases that can withstand the cold and rain until spring when the eggs hatch into tiny new-born spiders. Some spiders hibernate, and invade our houses to seek shelter. They then become pests.

Basically, nature conserves energy in insects during the winter to ensure survival of the species. We look forward to the diversity of our insect population when spring arrives and they awaken once more!

