Benton County Master Gardener Problem Diagnosis Scenario #48

(Boxelder Bugs)

**Problem:** The side of our home is covered in bugs. How do I get rid of them?

**Description:** Thousands of brown bugs spread across the outside walls of a home.

**Questions and Answers:**

Question: What do the bugs look like exactly?
Answer: They are about one-half inch long, with black bodies and black wings with red markings. They look kind of like beetles, but softer. They can even fly!

Question: Where are they located?
Answer: They are mostly on the southern side of the house wall, facing the sun.

Question: Are they on plants outside?
Answer: Yes, some are on the shrubs and other plants.

Question: Are you finding them inside the house as well?
Answer: Yes, a few on the inside of the same wall. I don’t know how they are getting in.

Question: Have you noticed any damage from them?
Answer: Not really, but it looks there are some droppings spotting our blinds. The plants seem to be okay.

Question: Do you have any maple or boxelder trees on your property?
Answer: We have maples but no boxelders that I know of.

**Reference(s):** [http://oregonstate.edu/dept/kbrec/boxelder-bug](http://oregonstate.edu/dept/kbrec/boxelder-bug)

**Diagnosis:** Infestation of boxelder bugs (Leptocoris trivittatus). They are primarily a nuisance pest. They usually winter near a boxelder tree, where in summer they feed on the pods. Throughout the fall, winter and early spring, bugs may continue to enter the home as they move about on warmer days. Nuisance infestations should be finished by late May, as the boxelder bugs have either died or moved back to the host trees.

**Recommendations:**

**Cultural controls:** Removing female boxelder trees and sometimes maples in the neighborhood is the most permanent solution to the problem, although this may not be practical or desirable. Use a vacuum cleaner to control bugs that have entered the house. Screening or sealing cracks or other entrances into the dwelling is important. Once boxelder bugs have entered the home, control becomes more difficult.

**Biological controls:** None

**Chemical controls:** Laundry detergent mixed with water is cheap, safe and effective when applied directly to boxelder bugs. Drawbacks of detergent sprays are that they will kill only if they contact the insect directly, and they may damage vegetation. Household insecticidal aerosols and some cleaners are also effective when applied directly to individual insects.