

## Five Frequent Plant Clinic Submissions

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Late summer- harvest starts to roll in, so do insect and plant disease questions. The “magic” of 2020 has affected your local plant clinic as it has many other things: instead of a team of Master Gardeners in office most days of the week, the majority of horticulture questions are being handled by a single faculty member, resulting in some longer response times. For contactless question submission, one option is Extension’s “Ask an Expert” service: try it at <https://ask.extension.org/ask>.

Meanwhile, some questions coming in to the clinic are recurring and frequent. If several community members bring a specific issue to the clinic, several to several dozen more are wondering about it, so this week’s focus is some of the frequent question topics submitted to the Klamath County Extension office in recent weeks.

**Box elder bugs.** As days grow shorter and nights cooler, these plant- feeding bugs show up on the sides of houses in alarming numbers. Box elder bugs feed primarily on a species of maple tree, *Acer negundo*. University of Idaho notes feeding on about twenty other plant species, but box elder bugs cannot reproduce on those plants. Their fact sheet is full of useful info:

<https://www.extension.uidaho.edu/publishing/pdf/CIS/CIS1155.pdf>. A full listing of appropriate chemicals accessible to homeowners for this pest is included: however, availability doesn’t make them the best option. Removal with a vacuum is preferable for a number of reasons. Exclusion, sealing up cracks and crevices of the house exterior, is also helpful. Box elder bugs will seek shelter between siding and the actual structure. Despite incredibly large populations these insects don’t contribute to any structural damage.

**Seed bugs.** Box elder bugs belong to a family Rhopalidae. A related family of more than 205 species, the Lygaeidae, are known as the seed bugs. This group includes predators like the Big-eyed bug, and numerous seed- feeders that can be found on a wide variety of host (food) plants. The most notorious insect from this group is the chinch bug, destroyer of lawns. Lygaeid species can be hard to distinguish from one another- but many have the same overwintering- in- cracks- and- crevices habit mentioned above. The bad news: these nuisance bugs will increase in numbers as the season progresses. The good news: the first hard frost will kill many of them off naturally.

**Flea Beetles.** A second generation of flea beetles is emerging, attacking vegetables like eggplants and peppers. Multiple species of flea beetles exist on Oregon: they are tiny, about 1mm long, and black or metallic. They are strong jumpers, thus the “flea” in their common name. Flea beetles cause damage both as larvae and adults, though sometimes to different parts of the plant. In potato, adults cause “shot-hole” damage to leaves, while the larvae feed on tubers. “Shot holes” – lots of little round holes in leaves- are an important clue to flea beetle infestation, but can be hard to distinguish from similar holes caused by disease. The key difference is that shot hole caused by diseases start with a lesion that changes color, then falls out: holes from flea beetle feeding are just gone, without the progression. Shot holes from either can be surrounded by a yellow “halo”.

**Vespid Wasps.** Yellow jackets and mud wasps, like many other insects, steadily build up populations over the growing season. As we approach fall, their numbers and more aggressive activity precipitate numerous calls to the Extension office. Like other insects, a hard frost knocks back population numbers

considerably. If possible, wait until after a few frosts to remove nests- the wasps are unlikely to return to the same place next year. If nest location is problematic and waiting is not an option, treatments at night are more effective (everyone is inside). Be sure to wear protective clothing, long sleeves, and follow pesticide label instructions. No giant Asian hornets have been found in Oregon- suspected giant Asian hornet "sightings" have turned out to be a native wasp called the cicada killer.

**Weed ID.** Numerous requests for weed identification have been submitted in recent weeks- most containing multiple plants to be identified. These requests are completely reasonable- a good weed control strategy must start with proper identification- but may require longer response time. In order to speed the process and ensure accuracy, a good sample is invaluable. An entire plant including roots, leaves, and flowers has the best shot at getting a correct ID, enabling the identifier to recognize the plant's growth habit, whether it has fibrous roots or a taproot, and whether leaves are opposite or alternate- features that enable speedy and accurate identification. Check out the Weed ID tool at UC Davis ([http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/weeds\\_intro.html](http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/weeds_intro.html)) to try your hand at identification, or see examples of the characteristics necessary to good ID.