



Winter Evidence of Insect Pests

By Pamm Cooper, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

One insect that occurred in large numbers this past year is the bagworm *Thyridopteryx ephemeraeformis*. It is a moth whose caterpillar used to primarily feed on arborvitae, juniper, pines and other evergreens. The caterpillars, however, may leave the host plants they have defoliated to feed on other woody plants close by. Oaks, cherries, and willows are now known host plants, and others may be affected in the future.

The bagworm caterpillars hide by day in a hanging bag made from silk and pieces of host plant foliage. The female moths have no wings, eyes, mouth or legs and lay eggs inside their bag where eggs remain for the winter. Eggs of bagworms will begin to hatch in May through June and hundreds of caterpillars begin feeding and constructing their own nests. Spread of the moths is slow because the females cannot fly but stands of trees can be decimated over time. Look for the gray bags hanging from the affected trees during the winter and remove them, if possible. Do not compost as eggs may hatch and caterpillars may find a host plant nest year. Instead, place in the trash to be taken offsite.



Bagworm casing. Photo by Pamm Cooper.

Another insect pest that seems to be overwintering well this year is the boxwood leaf miner, a pest of common boxwoods (*Buxus sempervirens*). Adults are tiny flies that may go

unnoticed in the spring. The larvae are small, yellowish maggots that feed within the leaves of newer foliage. Each leaf miner larva feeds within its own small area of the leaf causing leaves to look blotchy-yellowing and puffy, and whole leaves can appear like off-color pillows if several larvae are inside the same leaf. Heavy infestations can cause leaf drop, slow growth, or dying terminals. The larvae survive within the leaves where they will feed all winter. Cut off infested stems in the spring before adults emerge. Severe infestations that cannot be corrected by proper timing of pruning can be addressed by using an appropriate systemic insecticide applied next spring.

Alas, there are also insect pests that favor our little New England homes for the winter. Some are simply pests because they are in our homes, for example the leaf-footed bugs and convergent lady beetles.

But some are more than unwanted house guests. The brown marmorated stink bug, *Halyomorpha halys*, was first collected in Pennsylvania in 1998 but is now present in Connecticut. It feeds on an assortment of plants, especially on fruits and vegetables. These bugs have white bands on their antennae - a diagnostic aid in identifying this stink bug from similar species. If you notice these bugs in your home, it is best to kill them rather than putting them outside again. It is better if they are dead so this coming next year garden plants including fruits and vegetables as well as perennials and orchards will have one less pest to deal with.

For more information on identifying and controlling these insects or on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.