

Brown Marmorated Stink Bug: Annoying, Abundant

A non-native species of stink bugs has proliferated in the mid-Atlantic region over the past decade.

By Aaron Stern/The Almanac

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They seem to turn up everywhere in a home. Climbing the door molding of the bathroom, navigating the crevice between couch back and cushion. Pull out a seldom used pair of pants and one might fall out, likely dead.

Stink bugs have long been a part of the local ecosystem, but in recent months and years their presence has gone from occasional to seemingly perpetual. That's because a species imported from Asia that first turned up in Pennsylvania in 2000 has no natural predators and has boomed in population, say local naturalists. It is the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug — or *Halyomorpha halys*, its scientific name — and it likely caught a ride on cargo shipped to the United States sometime in the late 1990s, said Debbie Ricigliano, a horticulture consultant with the University of Maryland's Home and Garden Information Center.

"Most likely, that's the one we've been getting the majority of calls on this winter," said Ricigliano, whose office has been beset with complaints and questions about the bugs this winter.

Stink bugs range between 15-20 millimeters in size and they get into homes by any means necessary, exploiting cracks, screens, or open windows and are naturally attracted to light sources.

"A light on near a cracked window is the holy grail for stink bugs," said Lynn Etheridge, a naturalist at Locust Grove Nature Center in Cabin John Regional Park.

They strive to get inside for the winter not to hibernate, but instead to overwinter, said Etheridge, meaning that they simply look for a cozy home in which they can be less active when it's cold out.

Once in, they tend to wander or fly — slowly and clumsily — around a home, and tend to be more active on unseasonably warm days.

Because the bugs feed on fruits and vegetables, they will starve to death before long unless a plethora of such food is laying around. Otherwise their pointy beaks won't find any use unless, of course, someone picks them up to throw them outside, at which point the bugs may either poke them with their beak or emit the foul odor — the defense mechanism by which the insect earned its name. The beak poking feels like a pinprick, and the bugs pose no harm beyond a simple nuisance.

"They fall into the category of just being a pest," said Ricigliano of the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug.

"They don't destroy your home like termites, they don't spread diseases — they're just annoying."

They also don't reproduce indoors, said Etheridge, so home owners don't need to fear opening up a sock drawer in the spring to find it crawling with newly-born insects.

Yet like so many non-native species of plants and animals, being out of their element is good for them, but not necessarily the world around them.

"They have no natural predators, so their numbers increase because there's nothing here to control them," said Ricigliano. Another non-native species, the emerald ash borer beetle, has decimated forests around the country in recent year and scientists are struggling to combat it.

That does not appear to be the case with the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug — unless abundance and annoyance counts as a threat.

"It does seem like they're everywhere now," said Etheridge, and everywhere even includes the offices at Locust Grove. As Etheridge spoke to The Almanac by phone recently she said they could be seen all around her office nestled in Cabin John Regional Park, and that they have even begun settling for an indoor home in temporary shelters. "They're in the car, they're on the car — they're just everywhere right now," she said.

To learn more about the stink bugs visit hgic.umd.edu/content/brownstinkbug.cfm, or to track a Rutgers University study about their recent population explosion, visit njaes.rutgers.edu/stinkbug.

Treatment recommendations are as follows: Treat the structures or buildings by power spraying the south, east and west side of the building. Treat heavy around base of the foundation, and treat shrubbery adjacent to foundation. Two treatments in the fall and two treatments in the spring approximately 45 to 60 apart.