

## Five Insects Commonly Brought to KBREC Plant Clinic

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In winter, we have few submissions to the Plant Clinic at Klamath Basin Research and Extension Center- giving us a chance to reflect on commonly asked questions and problems to provide insight for planning trainings so Master Gardeners are well prepared to answer clients' questions. Here are five insects that we see frequently during the growing season- keep your eyes open for them this growing season.

**Dermestid Beetles.** Commonly known as carpet beetles, these tiny beetles are most frequently noticed around brightly lit windows in spring and early summer and are found over the US on flowers, where they serve as pollinators. Here in Klamath, where air conditioning is infrequently used, open windows become an entry point for trouble. Dermestid beetles enter our homes and lay eggs that hatch into tiny, almost microscopic larvae that can feed on a wide variety of things commonly found in our homes: wool, taxidermy, pet food, feathers and fur, carpet fibers, and grain based food products- crackers, corn meal, etc. The larvae feed, often unnoticed, until time to pupate. This is the second time that people notice them- when larvae leave the food source, often travelling pretty amazing distances- to find suitable pupation space. The best way to control these beetles is to find and eliminate the food source. Keep screens in good repair to reduce the instance of them getting into the home.

**Mirid Bugs.** Also known as "seed bugs", these true bugs are part of a large family, a few of which are significant pests of ornamental plants and lawn. Most feed on developing seeds or other plant parts with straw-like mouthparts, rarely causing damage to our plants. Mirid bugs are commonly brought to the plant clinic in late summer, when temperatures fall and they begin to congregate on and around our homes to overwinter. These bugs congregate in leaf litter or mulch around the house, or between siding and the house itself, coming out onto the surface during warm sunny weather. Mirids are an annoyance, but do not cause any real damage. The best treatment for seed bugs is a shop-vac.

**Aphids.** With more than 3,000 known species, aphids are the nemesis of any long- time gardener. Some are specialized feeders, while other species of aphids feed on a wide range of plant types. Our tough winters knock down overwintering populations, but coloration that is often closely matched to their food plants makes aphids difficult to detect. Season extension techniques like home greenhouses can become harboring places for overwintering aphids, or we may bring them in on houseplants or transplants in spring- inspect plants carefully! If caught early, aphids can be controlled in home situations with soapy water sprayed onto their bodies.

**Earwigs.** Another insect found all over the US, and particularly problematic in our area, especially early in the growing season. An aggressive trapping program using fish oil or cooking oil with a few drops of bacon grease is recommended by University of CA, Davis. Finally- a use for all those lids that don't seem to go with any dishes. To be honest, most people know what these are and don't bring them in to the clinic- but earwigs are definitely a source of frustration for gardeners who come from other parts of the country where earwigs exist, but don't ruin entire plantings or parsley or sunflowers overnight.

**Wood- boring beetles.** Actually a class of pest and not a single insect, wood-boring beetles in our area are very common and generally belong to one of two insect families. The Buprestids are football shaped beetles that are often metallic and from a half inch to several inches long. The Bronze birch borer, discovered in Klamath Falls two years ago, is a Buprestid. The Scolytidae are tiny, fraction- of – an – inch

beetles whose emergence from your tree give it a “shot-hole” appearance- lots of tiny holes in the bark. These pests are among the toughest that we encounter at the plant clinic: treatment for them is expensive and difficult. Because the first damage is done inside the tree just under the bark, it is often difficult to detect until it is substantial. Often, an infestation of wood-boring beetles means the tree will have to be removed. One of our best defenses against these pests is keeping trees healthy, as both attack trees that are weak for some other reason (we call them secondary invaders). Keeping mature trees watered in summer is an important way to help them maintain health and ward off these pests.