

## Boxelder Bugs



Box elder bug. Photo courtesy of Bruce Marlin; [http://www.cirrusimage.com/bugs\\_box\\_elder.htm](http://www.cirrusimage.com/bugs_box_elder.htm) .

Boxelder bugs are brightly colored insects. Two species are found in North America, *Boisea rubrolineata* and *B. trivittata*. The western boxelder bugs occur from Baja California north into British Columbia. The eastern species occurs in the rest of the continent. Adults are about 1/2 inch long, greyish brown with thin red stripes on the thorax and wings. The base of the legs, and bottom and top of the abdomen are bright red. Immature bugs are entirely bright red in color.

The minute red eggs are laid in cracks and crevices in the bark of boxelder trees in the spring. Adults overwinter in sheltered spots around the base of trees and in and around buildings or other structures.

Boxelder bugs occur throughout North America. In areas with cold climates the adults leave their host trees and form swarms or clusters in sunny locations on buildings or tree trunks in the fall and spring near their food plants. These over-wintering aggregations can be spectacular when large numbers of individuals are involved. However, the large numbers of individuals and their droppings can become a nuisance, particularly if the aggregation occurs indoors, in an

entry way or garage. These aggregations are formed by overwintering adults. They generally don't leave the aggregation, but on warm sunny days may reactivate and move around. In the spring they leave these aggregations to search for food, water and mates.

Adults and young both feed on the foliage and seeds of boxelder and maple trees. However, less commonly they will also feed on young developing fruit of apples, cherries, grapes, peaches and plums. Their bite punctures cause dimpling and scarring of the fruit. For the most part, however, they are not considered agricultural pests, but are more of a nuisance in some parts of the country than others.

Boxelder bugs are harmless. They don't bite or damage structures. They are also unlikely to cause damage to plants. The best way to prevent aggregations is exclusion—making sure to seal cracks, keep openings associated with utility wires and pipes sealed and well fitting weather stripping on the bottom of all external doors.