VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

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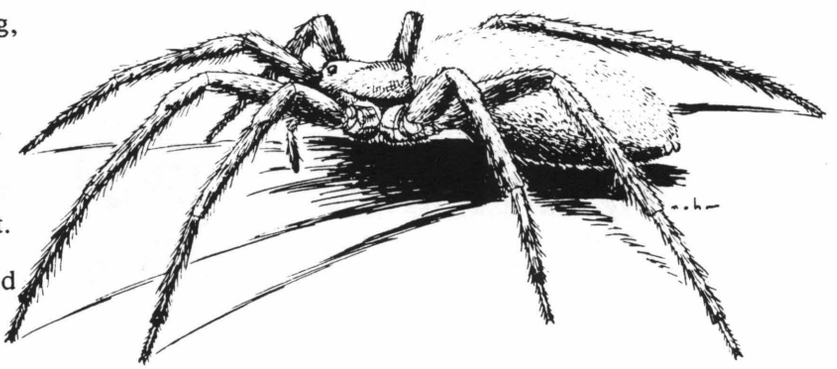
INSECT NOTES

SPIDERS

Spiders become active indoors and outdoors in the spring. Their webs can be seen on shrubs and in the corners of rooms, wolf spiders--those big and threatening looking spiders, are often stalking across the floor in the basement. The activity of spiders reflect the general activity of insects in the early spring. Spiders feed on insects, so as insects become more numerous, spiders become more evident!

Wolf spiders are perhaps the most unwelcome spiders inside the house. Not because they are likely to hurt anyone, or create any damage--just because they are big, hairy (which makes them look even bigger), and fast moving. They certainly do not go unnoticed in a kitchen or bathroom! These animals are called "wolf spiders because they are solitary hunters. They do not build a web to catch their food (insects), but prefer to chase 'um around the kitchen or basement. There are several species of wolf spiders that commonly invade houses, but most spend their time outdoors. The Carolina wolf spider is the largest we have in Virginia, and at 2-3 inches it is a LARGE spider!



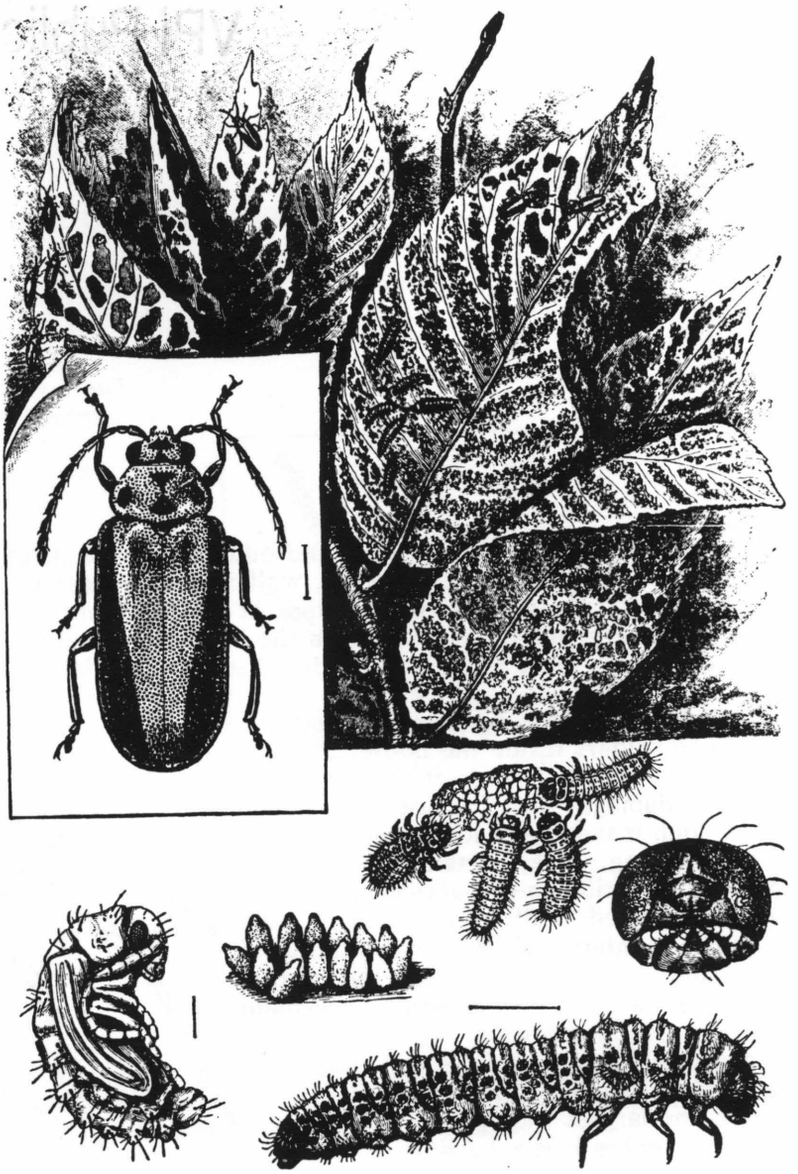
Window spiders (jumping spiders) are very common indoor spiders the year round, but can be a little more active in the spring. These critters are also hairy, but small and have the ability to jump when disturbed. They do not build much of a web, but prefer to pounce on their prey much like the wolf spiders. One of the interesting aspects of window spiders is their eyes--they have eight of them on the front of their head, and the eyes can be very shiny.

Control of spiders indoors is rarely needed. These are beneficial animals and rarely do they present a threat to man. However, there are times when these animals are not welcome. An aerosol spray directed at them will provide immediate knockdown and kill. Don't over do it, and there is no need to spray outdoors for spiders.

ELM LEAF BEETLE

Elm leaf beetles are common pests in the spring and fall. However, it is during the spring when the overwintering adults become active, and are most noticed by homemakers. They overwinter in protected places around the house, and become active when the leaves of elm trees begin to form.

Description. These beetles are about 1/4 inch long, with a yellowish body and an olive green and black stripe along each side of the back. The stripes are sometimes not distinct in the darg green forms. There are several black spots behind the head.



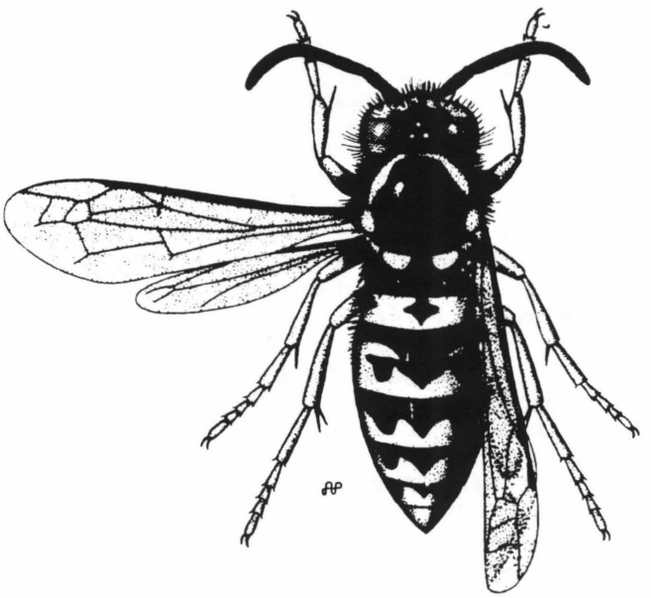
In the spring and summer the larvae and adult beetles feed on the leaves of elms. When the larvae become full grown they crawl down the trunk of the tree and pupate in the soil. Successive generations continue throughout the summer and into fall. When the weather turns cold the adults seek a protected place to spend the winter.

Control. There is no danger of household infestations-- these insects simply spend the winter in and around houses. Common yard and garden insecticides can be used to treat the bark of trees and the leaves of small trees. Power spraying the entire tree is probably not necessary (or possible!). An aerosol spray can be used indoors to control the few beetles that may gain entrance. Caulking around the eaves of the roof can help prevent the adults from entering.

YELLOWJACKET CONTROL - NOW!

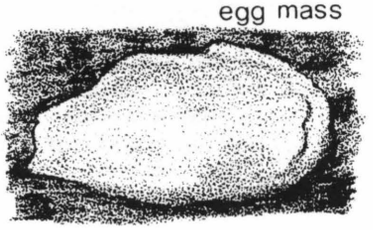
Yellowjacket queens that have spent the winter in protected places around houses, attics, and in logs and trees in wooded areas are now emerging and looking for locations to begin building a nest. While these are beneficial insects [they eat caterpillars and stuff like that!], they can pose a threat to people with their nest-defending behavior--they sting!

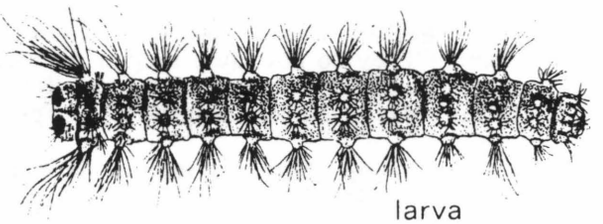
Yellowjackets and other wasps build new nests in the spring (they don't use the old ones). The queen starts off with a small paper nest that she builds herself. After she produces a few workers the nest becomes bigger. The best time to eliminate yellowjackets, umbrella wasps, and other unwelcome wasps from around the house is in the early spring. You can scrape away the nest when the queen is not there, in this way she will probably build the nest somewhere else. Or you can wait until she returns and spray her with an aerosol insecticide. There is no need for extensive spraying, or to eliminate all the nesting sites--just the ones that pose an immediate threat to people.

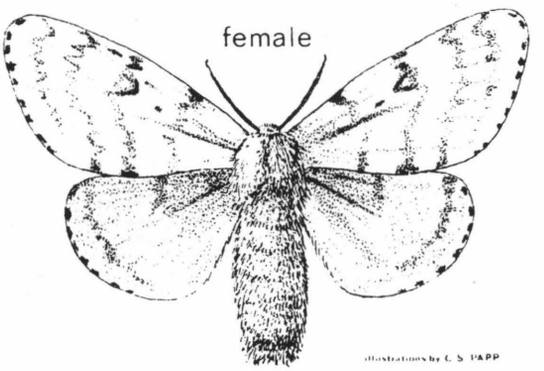


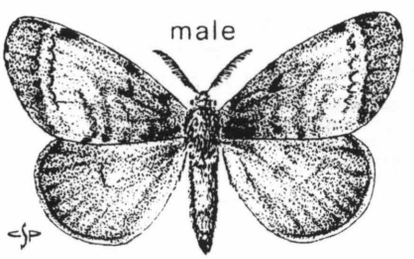
GYPSY MOTH

Porthetria dispar







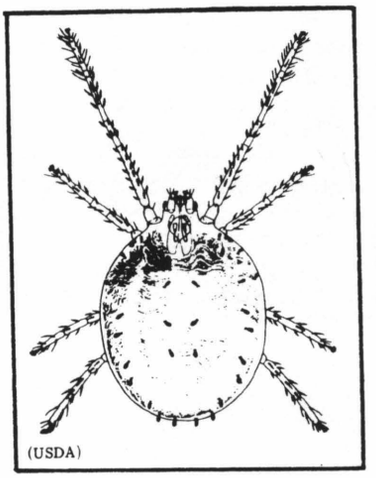


Illustrations by C. S. PAPP

INSECT NOTE:

CLOVER MITES AS TURF AND HOUSEHOLD PESTS

Clover mites can be pests because they often occur in large numbers, and not just on turfgrass! In some years these small, reddish brown mites can be so numerous that they crawl up and almost cover the sides of houses and other buildings. Their pest status comes not from the fact that they cause any damage, but because they occur in large numbers, and sometime enter houses.


(USDA)

Life cycle. Eggs are laid on vegetation in the summer and fall. Some eggs hatch in the summer, others hatch in the following spring. After hatching they pass through a larval and nymph stage, then to an 8-legged adult. There are no males in the population--everybody is a female. That compounds the problem, because every member of the population can lay eggs (mating is not necessary for egg laying). Populations in turfgrass seem to have 3-4 year fluctuations, that is the populations will peak on a regular basis.

Feeding habits. Clover mites feed on several different kinds of grasses and other plants. They do not cause serious damage to the plants they feed on, and their feeding is not evident in the appearance of the turf. Although they can move indoors when mites move to the sides of houses, they do not infest houses--they can not live there.

Control. Spraying insecticide in a 2 to 3 ft. band around the perimeter of the house or building can help keep these pests from entering. It may not be possible to treat an entire lawn for clover mites. Keep in mind that some insecticides may not be successful in controlling these mites. Indoors, an aerosol insecticide can be used to treat around doors and windows.