

# VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

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## FALL WRAP-UP

There are few household insect pests at this time of year. The house flies, fruit flies, gnats, mosquitoes, sod webworm moths, and other flying insects have been slowed or killed by the early frosts. However, there are some insects that are found in and around the home and lawn at this time of year.

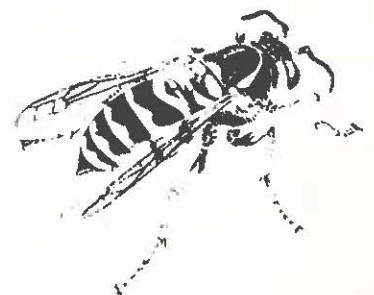
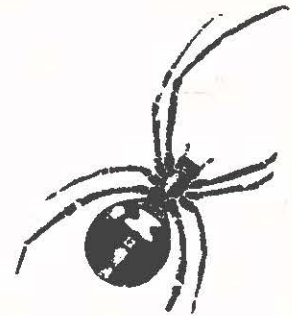
**Firewood insects.** Ants, spiders, parasitic wasps, yellowjackets, and beetles may seek winter refuge in logs or under the bark of firewood. These insects may become active when the wood is brought into a warm environment--they may be attracted to lights or fly to windows. Insects from firewood rarely infest household wood or materials. The only concern should be the elimination of individual insects. Aerosols or a fly swatter can be used for control.

There are a few species of beetles that feed as larvae under the bark or within firewood logs. On warm days in the summer and late fall, the chewing sounds of the larvae under the bark can alarm homeowners. There is often the fear that the wood pile will be "consumed" by the larvae, or the larvae will move from the firewood to household wood. Neither of these will occur! There is no need to chemical treat firewood to protect it from attacking insects--nor are there any insecticides that are labeled for this purpose!

Carpenter ants often nest in firewood, especially in logs that are close to the ground and may have some decay cavities. These ants nest in wood; they do



## INSECT NOTES



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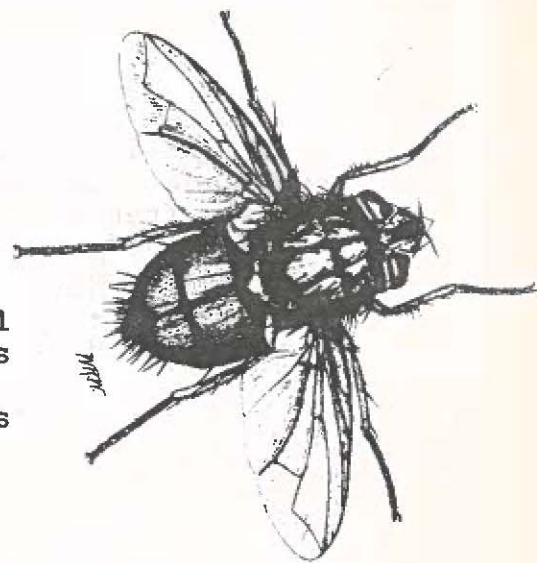
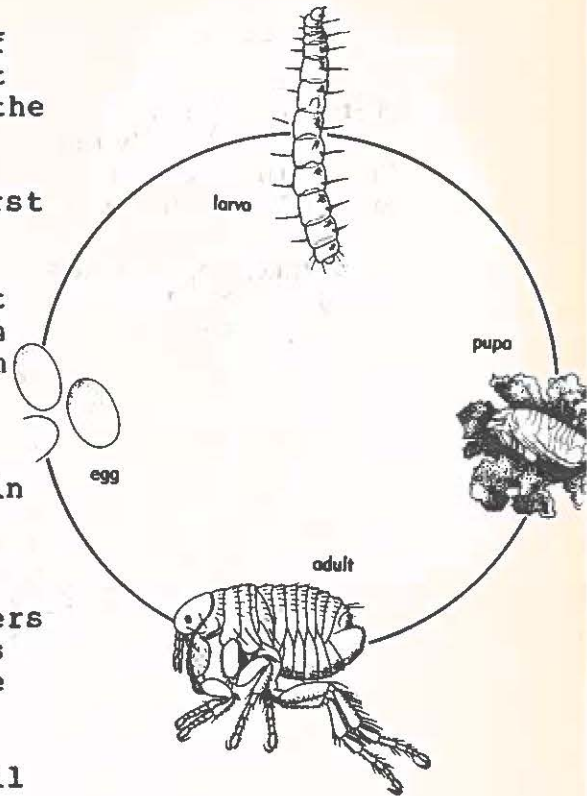
not eat it. Carpenter ants may move out of nests in logs that are brought indoors, but the ants will not form or reform nests in the house.

**Yellowjackets and wasps.** The first frosts of the year will kill most of the worker yellowjackets and wasps. Only the queens overwinter, and build new nests next year. The few workers that make it through early frosts often fly indoors seeking warm shelter. These insects can be swatted! or killed with an aerosol. Large numbers of yellowjackets indoors may indicate a nest within the house--perhaps in the attic or in a cavity between the siding.

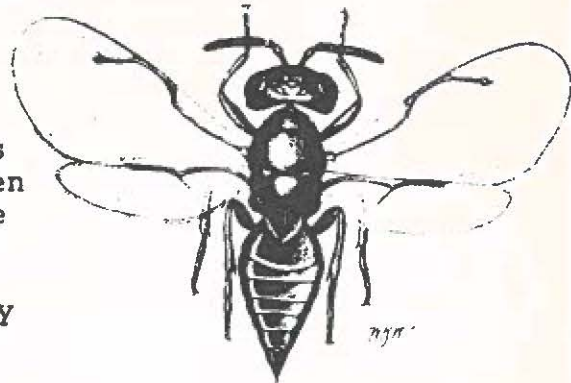
**Fleas.** The cooler and drier fall weather will bring a reduction in the numbers of household fleas. However, dogs and cats that spend much time indoors can still have problems until late fall--when household heating significantly lowers the relative humidity. House pets usually maintain small flea populations throughout the winter, the numbers increase slowly in the spring and may "explode" in mid- to late summer. Although vacuuming only removes a small percentage of the flea larvae in carpet, vacuuming can remove a large percentage of flea eggs--if it is done on a regular basis. The key to successful household flea control is frequent vacuuming of pet bedding and resting areas, treatment of the pet, and careful use of insecticides.

**Cluster flies.** These large flies enter houses in mid- to late summer, and become active in the winter months. They often fly/buzz at upstairs windows--then die on the window sill! The use of "no-pest strips" and total-release aerosols in the attic can help to eliminate some, but not all of these pests. The best time for control is August of next year! The larvae of these flies are parasitic on earthworms--that means there will be plenty of food available. The best control program is not aimed at the larval stage, but at the adult stage.

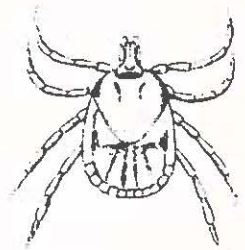
**Fungus gnats.** Over-watered house plants can provide a place for fungus gnat



larvae to live. The larvae feed on the moist decaying organic matter in the soil of potted plants. The adults don't feed at all, but fly about the house and alarm homeowners! These insects rarely harm house plants. Control is as easy as letting the potting soil dry out and/or soaking a few cigarettes in a half of a glass of water for a day, then pouring the liquid over the plant soil. The nicotine in the water will kill the larvae!

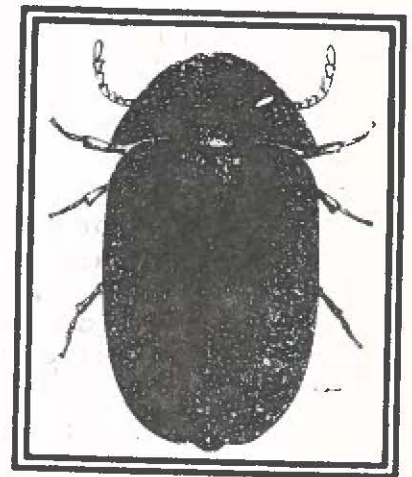


**Ticks.** Deer, small game, and turkey hunters can bring tick in from the woods on their clothes (or on the animals). Clothes should be inspected carefully for ticks and bird lice (from game birds). Both hard ticks and soft ticks can be encountered in the woods, and returned to the house. Use repellents when in the woods in the early fall.



### **CIGARETTE BEETLE**

The cigarette beetle is one of the most common household insect pests. It can be found throughout the year, but seems to be more common in the fall and winter months. As its name implies, this beetle is a pest of dried tobacco, either in the stored or bundled form, or as cigarettes, cigars, and chewing tobacco. But the larval stages of the cigarette beetle can feed on a variety of stored products, including grain, cereal products, ginger, raisins, dates, pepper, dried fish, drugs, and seeds. This feeding habits often makes them a serious pantry pest; and the range of food habits makes them difficult to locate and control.



Infestations of cigarette beetles have been reported from dried flowers. The larvae can feed within the head of the flowers in the arrangement, causing the flower to drop or all the petals to fall. Infestations of this type may be "fumigated" by using a small amount of moth crystals in a plastic bag, and holding the flowers in the plastic bag for a day or two.

The adult cigarette beetles are oval, about 1/10 inch long, and are covered with

small hairs which give them a silky, yellowish-brown color. The female produces about 100 eggs, and they are deposited on or near the available food supply. The small, grub-like larvae are slightly smaller than the adult beetles. The larvae are creamy white except for the yellow head and dark brown mouthparts. Larvae become full grown in about 40 days. The entire life cycle can be completed in 45-50 days, and there may be 3-6 generations a year.

**Control.** The first step in control of the cigarette beetle is to locate the source of the infestation. Dried food in cabinets and storage areas should be carefully inspected--and infested foods discarded. It is usually not necessary to spray insecticides into cabinets for cigarette beetle control. Removal of infested material should solve the problem.



#### CLOTHES MOTHS

Clothes moths can feed on wool products, such as clothing, carpets, rugs, furs, fabrics, blankets, and piano felts. They may feed on fabrics of vegetable origin (cotton) if the fabrics are mixed with wool or be soiled with food particles. These articles must be protected from clothes moth attack, either by frequent cleaning or storing in insect-free environments.

Clothes moths can be serious pests of small or large wool rugs. The caterpillars can feed on the underside of the carpet for a long time--do considerable damage--before they are detected. Wool rugs should be inspected, and cleaned (if small enough) on a regular basis.

Clothes moths are small, yellowish to slightly gold colored moths with narrow, slightly pointed wings. They are not attracted to lights, and usually hide when disturbed.

