

## The invasion of smelly houseguests has begun

September 27, 2012

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The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — They're baaack.

Pesky brown marmorated stink bugs are once again invading homes in the region as they search for a place to spend the winter — only this time, it looks like they have a foe.

"They showed up Friday," said Christopher Bergh, an entomologist at the Alson H. Smith Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center on Laurel Grove Road in Frederick County.

From Asia, brown marmorated stink bugs first began showing up in the area in legions two autumns ago. When frightened or crushed, they emit an unpleasant odor. They also damage crops by sucking out juices.

On Saturday, at the Rotary Club of Winchester's annual Apple Harvest Arts and Crafts Festival in Jim Barnett Park, Bergh had a display of the many diseases and insects that harm apples. The exhibit included the ill effects of stink bugs on fruit and some young stink bug nymphs to show people what they look like.

Bergh and others at the local research center have been monitoring the presence of stink bugs by counting how many are on the outside of the facility's buildings at the same time every day.

On Friday, that took a long time.

Bergh said the stink bugs are back in droves, though their arrival is later than it has been the past two seasons — which may have given people hope that they weren't going to return.

When they show up seems to be geared to the length of daylight, he said.

Over the summer, they're out feeding off fruits, vegetables and other plants. But in the fall, when days become shorter, stink bugs have a new agenda — finding a warm spot to spend the winter, such as inside homes.

The third week in September appears to be the time frame for the change, said Tracy Leskey, who is studying the stink bug's habits for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Appalachian Research Center in Kearneysville, W.Va.

"Homeowners will have to continue to fight the invasion" for several weeks, she said.

"It's begun in earnest," Bergh added.

Stink bugs did appear to be fewer and farther between this summer, Bergh said. He noted that that could be because of last year's unusual fall weather, which included tropical storms and a rare October snowfall.

That may have taken a toll on stink bug nymphs, he said, and cut down on the number that survived to breed in the spring. "We saw a lot of mortality [last fall]."



A stink bug clings to a leaf in an apple orchard on Laurel Grove Road Wednesday afternoon.



A wheel bug has been called "the ultimate slayer" of stink bugs.



Chris Bergh, a professor of entomology at the Alson H. Smith Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center, takes a daily count of stink bugs on the building Wednesday afternoon. This stink bug was crawling on the front door window.

But this year's warm March weather gave them an early start, Leskey said. "The population did rebound."

Those young stink bugs matured and bred, and two new generations — born in spring and summer — have arrived. The nymphs go through five different stages to reach adulthood, but they do it in 30 days.

Unlike some insects that target apples, the damage a stink bug does in sucking juices from the fruit doesn't always show up on the outside. Sometimes the apple must be cut open to see the brown spots.

John Marker, of Marker-Miller Orchards and Farm Market, says local fruit growers have been spraying for the pest since spring. While only a few were spotted at the beginning of the growing season, Marker said if you see a few, "you figure you've got them."

Perhaps thanks to the spraying, "we haven't seen a whole lot of pressure" from the insects, Marker said.

Leskey said scientists have made some progress in creating a pheromone lure that can attract the brown marmorated stink bug. It has been tested in 10 states so far.

Information on what lures a stink bug has been passed on to companies, which will hopefully come up with a product that can be used in the field, Leskey said.

Attracting stink bugs is helpful in several ways for research, but the best thing will be if it can be used to lure them to a specific place where they can be "annihilated," Leskey said.

Until that time, homeowners must look elsewhere for help.

Leskey said she has several wheel bugs outside her office window that are "the ultimate slayer of stink bugs."

Though fairly shy and rarely seen, these large bugs, which have a structure on their backs like half a cog wheel, are one of the few insects that are a stink bug's natural enemy.

If you don't like stink bugs, it's a good idea to "promote their existence in the landscape," she said.

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