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Field Crickets Out and About Early This Year

As you may have noticed, the field crickets are showing their faces a little earlier this year. Crickets are normally an outdoor insect, usually found under rocks, logs or any crack or crevice. However, they can sometimes enter our homes, mainly under doorways and windows. Crickets feed on all organic matter, including decaying plant material and fungi. Since crickets breakdown plant materials, they are considered beneficial by renewing soil minerals. They are also a food source for many animals such as spiders, ground beetles, birds, lizards and small rodents. However due to their large populations and the male's mating song, some people wish to control them.

Some Control Options:

Non-Chemical Suggestions:

- 1) Caulk or seal cracks and gaps that are found in the foundation, around doors, windows, and garage doors.
- 2) Trim weeds and tall grass growing near the foundation.
- 3) Remove firewood, brush, rotting wood, boxes, bricks, stones and other objects from around the structure, in order to reduce the number of harborage areas.
- 4) For crickets found inside the home, vacuum or sweep up and then discard them.

Chemical Control Suggestions:

If a severe infestation exists, there are granular products that can be used for control, such as those containing hydramethylnon. There are also chemicals that can be sprayed outdoors to provide a barrier around homes, such as those containing pyrethrins or bifenthrin. There are also products that can be applied in indoor and outdoor cracks and crevices, such as those containing boric acid. Remember to dispose of dead crickets to reduce the smell and decrease the likelihood of ants feeding on the dead crickets.



A field cricket, *Gryllus* sp. (Orthoptera: Gryllidae). Photo by Dr. Bart Drees, Texas A&M University.

Earwax as an Insect Repellent?

Earwax, or actually the chemical cerumen found in earwax, could be soon made into an organic insect repellent. Cerumen is produced by glands that are located on the outer ear canal and it has a bitter taste. Some advantages of this insect repellent will be ease of production and the non-toxic effects on adults, children and animals. For more information, please visit: <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/discoblog/2010/07/13/ncbi-rofl-nothing-like-a-thin-coat-of-earwax-to-keep-the-bugs-away>.

Large Numbers of Bagworms Found on All Sorts of Hosts

This insect is usually first detected by observing the larval bags made up of bits and pieces of host plant leaves and twigs that are woven together with silk. As the larvae grow and feed in the spring and summer, so do their bags. The bags can vary in length from $\frac{1}{4}$ to 2 inches. Many broadleaf and evergreen trees and shrubs can serve as hosts for bagworm species, including arborvitae and other ornamental conifers, cedar, cypress, elm, fruit and nut trees, juniper, oak, locust, maple, persimmon, pines, sycamore, willow and many other ornamental plants.

Although bagworm species vary slightly in habits and life cycle, the bagworm usually spends the winter months in the egg stage within the bag produced by the female from the previous fall. Very small larvae spin strands of silk and are carried by the wind onto other plants, or larger larvae can crawl to adjacent plants. Full grown caterpillars pupate within their bags usually in the late summer. The male moths emerge out of the

bag. The male moths are black in color with ½ inch clear wings and feathery antennae. The male flies to mate with a female. The females remain inside their bags and do not have eyes, legs, mouthparts or antennae. After mating, the females produce between 500 to 1,000 eggs inside their bag and then die.

Infested plants develop more bagworms each year since the female stage does not fly. When there are large populations, the larvae can defoliate plants. Heavy infestations over several years, especially when added to other environmental stresses, can lead to plant death.

Some Control Options:

Non- Chemical Controls:

If only a few small trees or shrubs are infested, handpicking and destroying bags is recommended. During the winter months, the bags contain eggs and during the late spring and summer, the bags will contain a larva.

Chemical Control Options:

When many small bagworms, less than ½ inches are present, then it is recommended to treat with an insecticidal spray such as those containing acephate, azadiractin, spinosad, *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*, permethrin, or bifenthrin.



Bagworm, *Thyridopteryx ephemeraeformis* (Haworth) (Lepidoptera: Psychidae), larval "bag" on arborvitae. Photo by Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

Mention of commercial products is for educational purposes only and does not represent endorsement by Texas AgriLife Extension or The Texas A&M University System. Insecticide label registrations are subject to change, and changes may have occurred since this publication was printed. The pesticide user is always responsible for applying products in accordance with label directions. Always read and carefully follow the instructions on the container label.