



TREES & SHRUBS

Conifer Seed Bugs

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Quick Facts...

Conifer seed bugs are a common fall and winter nuisance in Colorado homes.

They develop on seeds of various plants, particularly pines.

They have a somewhat bizarre appearance and may produce a piney defensive odor when disturbed. However, they are harmless to people and do not breed indoors.

They can be difficult to completely exclude from homes. Careful sealing of exterior openings in late summer and early fall is particularly important.

Conifer seed bugs are a common fall and winter nuisance in Colorado homes. *Leptoglossus occidentalis* and *L. clypealis* are species found in Colorado. They are fairly large insects (about 5/8 to 3/4 inch long) and look rather bizarre. They fly readily and can produce an odd, somewhat piney odor when provoked. These behaviors can alarm homeowners. However, conifer seed bugs are harmless.

Members of the leaffooted bug family, they eat seeds and do not bite people. They enter homes in search of warm, protected sites to overwinter. This habit is shared by many other insects, such as boxelder bugs and elm leaf beetles. They do not reproduce in the home or damage household items.

Life History and Habits

Conifer seed bugs primarily feed and develop on seeds of various trees and shrubs. They prefer pines, Douglas-fir and other conifers but feed on developing seeds and fruits of a wide variety of plants, including dogwood and sumac.

The insects overwinter as adults under protective debris and other shelter. Frequently, they move into nearby homes where they may cause concern. However, during the cool season they are semidormant. They neither reproduce nor feed, but rather live off fat reserves.

In spring, the insects move to trees and feed on male flowers and year-old cones. Beginning in late May, females lay eggs glued in small groups to needles and leaves. The immature or nymph stages somewhat resemble wingless adults. Nymphs feed on the seeds through the summer. They become mature in August and September. Adults continue to feed on cones until they move to winter shelter. There is only one generation per year.

Control in the Home

There is probably little that will effectively control the occasional nuisance movement of conifer seed bugs into homes. The best action is to ensure that homes are well sealed during September and October, when most insects migrate from trees to buildings and other winter shelter. It is probable that insecticide applications to building exteriors, particularly directed at cracks and openings where the insects may enter, should assist in reducing numbers found indoors. However, insecticides have not been tested against these insects. Do not use insecticides to control insects already in the home. Swatting, vacuuming or otherwise disposing of individual insects is the appropriate response.



Putting Knowledge to Work

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Figure 2: Leaffooted bug, a relative of the western conifer seed.

Related or Similar Insects

People commonly confuse several insects with the conifer seed bugs. Because they frequently produce a defensive odor when disturbed, they are sometimes called stink bugs, a term properly applied to another group of moderately sized, oval-bodied insects.

Their elongate shape and pointed head also somewhat resemble certain assassin bugs. There are several

physical differences between these two insects. Perhaps most obvious is the broad thickening of the hind legs on the leaffooted bugs. Assassin bugs lack this and usually have a slightly thickened front leg. The mouthparts of assassin bugs are more conspicuous, projecting clearly from the front of the head. Those of conifer seed bugs are tucked more closely to the body. It is important to distinguish these two insects because they have different habits. Assassin bugs, unlike conifer seed bugs, can produce a painful bite.

Occasionally, a few other members of the leaffooted bug family occur in homes in Colorado. In warmer areas of the state, the squash bug, a notorious garden pest, may sometimes winter behind walls and be found in living areas. Also, the opuntia bug, which develops on prickly pear cactus, can sometimes be observed.



Figure 1: Conifer seed bug (leaffooted bug).



Figure 3: Western conifer seed bug. (Photo by Whitney Cranshaw.)



Figure 4: Conifer seed bug nymph. (Photo from the Ken Gray Collection.)