



Question of the Week

Q: Before World War II, bedbug infestations were common in the U.S., but the bugs were virtually eradicated. So why are they making a comeback, and do I need to worry?

A: Bedbugs are on the rise. Entomologists and pest control professionals are reporting a dramatic increase in infestations throughout the country, and no one knows exactly why. They feel it may be due to international travel or the ban on the insecticide DDT.

Bedbugs, *Cimex lectularis*, are flat, brown insects about ¼-inch long, similar in size to a small ladybug. After a blood meal they are dark red, rounded and about 3/8-inch long “redcoats.” Using piercing mouth parts, they bite at night, feeding on the blood of their hosts. The first bites don’t itch. After repeated bites, human antibodies cause itching and may produce a rash.

These insects often invade as stowaways in luggage or clothing from hotels; the bugs may also be carried into on used furniture, especially mattresses.

Bedbugs are hard to kill. They usually don’t travel far from the host, hiding out in bedding, mattresses, and any crevice in the room. To get rid of bedbugs, you must hire a licensed exterminator. Sprays available to consumers may give limited control, but bedbugs will continue breeding and you may have a much bigger problem within weeks. Eradicating these insects usually requires two or more visits from a professional, as the even the stronger sprays available to licensed pesticide applicators don’t kill the eggs, which take up to two weeks to hatch. Follow all the exterminator's instructions exactly.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu.