

Got the winter itches? Read this and itch some more.

Barb Ogg
Extension Educator

The extension office gets calls this time of year from folks complaining about getting bitten by unknown bugs/fleas/mites. We are often asked to try to help figure out what the problem can be. This time of year, dry humidity in houses results in dry air and static electricity that may cause sensations on the skin that feel like insect bites. Increasing the humidity and/or using lotions to remedy dry skin, may be helpful.

Sometimes, folks develop allergies to soaps, lotions, detergents and other household products that may make it seem like they are getting bitten. Other environmental sources of itching are dust, fiberglass insulation and paper fiber, cosmetics and even jewelry. An allergist or dermatologist may be helpful in determining skin allergies. Dry skin and skin allergies are the most common causes of bite-like sensations that people may have.

There are only a few insect or arthropod species that cause bite-like symptoms. Most of them are easily seen without the aid of a microscope or magnifying glass.

Fleas: These insects are black and jump from host to host. They are easily observed



without magnification. Flea infestations are usually associated with cats or dogs, but rarely, flea problems can show up without having a pet in the house. If there is a flea infestation in the home, people may get bitten, but the bites are usually on the legs and ankles and not on other parts of the body. The bite itself will be painful and noticeable immediately.

Spiders: Spiders are accused of many more bites than they actually commit. There are several groups of spiders that can live in houses and actively hunt at night for their food. Bites that appear after sleeping could be from spiders. The best way to prevent this problem is to disturb locations where spiders are found, like closets, by vacuuming these areas regularly. Spider bites are not very common in the winter.

Bedbugs: These blood sucking bugs are very uncommon, but we have had people bring them into the extension office. Flat, oval-shaped bedbugs feed at night, usually on the upper part of the body, upper arms, neck and chest area. Signs of bedbugs are spots of blood on the pillowcase or linens. The

bugs live in bedding or in cracks or tight places near the head of the bed. Locations where they hide during the day are under buttons on a mattress, between mattress and box springs or in cracks in the baseboard. Usually,

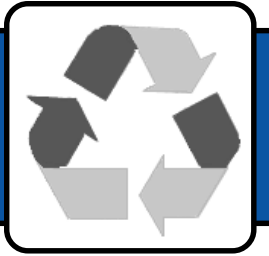


folks get them either from a stay in an infested motel and they bring them home in luggage or they bring infested furniture into their home. Birds and bats have similar bloodsucking bugs, called (logically enough) bird bugs and bat bugs. Elimination of birds or bat hosts is important in controlling these bugs. Bird and bat bug problems are not likely in the winter.

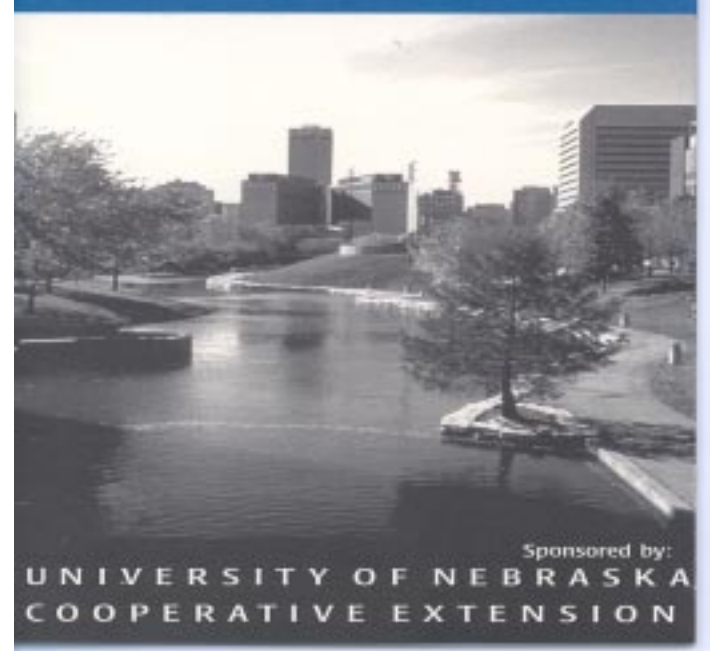
Mites: Both wild birds and pets (especially cats) can have mites that will transfer to people if the mite numbers are very high or, in the case of birds, if the birds leave their nest or roost or die. Mites are very tiny and not always easy to see. Removing the birds is the first step in eliminating this type of mite

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Environmental Focus



Workshop on URBAN CONSERVATION



Sponsored by:
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Douglas/Sarpy and Lancaster County is sponsoring a workshop on Urban Conservation, January 19 & 20, 2000 at Mahoney State Park's Kiewit Lodge. The workshop focuses on incorporating water quality into stormwater management, conservation subdivision design and the Darby Creek project - an innovative, environmentally sensitive development of Hidden Creek at the Darby.

Program funding for the event has been provided for by several federal, state and local agencies.

The workshop is third in a series designed to provide tools for decision-makers, consultants, municipal officials and citizens which will enable them to plan for environmentally sustainable community growth. For more information, contact Corey Brubaker or Karen Hansen at 402-441-7180. (KH)

The giving tree

Have you thought about how important and useful trees are to our lives? They provide us with oxygen we need to breathe, water that is vital to all living things, food for both animals and people, wood that we depend on for our houses, furniture and paper products - not to mention the oasis of shade on a steamy summer's day. This list of examples is, by no means complete, but will give you an idea of products that our trees produce.

Leaves: tea, oxygen, mulch, shade

Sap: maple syrup, rubber gloves, rubber hoses, rubber tires, rubber balls, rubber bands, chewing gum, paint, turpentine, varnish/lacquer, soap, rosin, asphalt/cement

Bark: asphalt/cement
Roots: sassafras tea
Fruit: avocados, chocolate, carnauba or Brazil wax, furniture polish, spices (allspice, nutmeg, mace, figs, olives)
Seeds: many edible nuts:

pistachios, macadamia, almonds, coconuts

Flowers: cloves, herbal teas with hibiscus flowers, linden flowers, orange blossoms, perfume

Wood: many wooden objects and paper products

Cellulose from the wood: cellophane, cellulose sponges, eyeglass frames, carpets, photographic film, toothbrush handles, combs, rayon clothing, rocket fuel. (ALH)

Winter bubbles

How does blowing bubbles in the winter affect the bubbles? Try this recipe and find out!

Materials:

1 cup dishwashing liquid
2 cups warm tap water
Plastic bowl

4 tablespoons glycerine
1 teaspoon sugar

Bubble blower

Procedure:

1. Mix the dishwashing liquid and the warm tap water in the plastic bowl.

2. Add the glycerine.

3. Add the sugar.

4. Go outside on a cold night and blow bubbles with the solution. What do you notice about the bubbles?

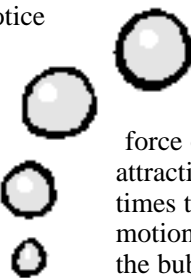
5. Blow bubbles inside and compare these with the ones you blew outside.

Explanation:
Water and dishwashing liquid form a thin film that can be inflated with air to form

a bubble. Soap bubbles are shaped by the balance between the outward pressure of the gas

inside them and the force of surface tension holding the liquid of the bubbles together.

Surface tension is the force of the molecules in water attracting one another. Sometimes the bubbles appear to be motionless. If it is cold enough, the bubbles will sparkle as they freeze, and if they hit the snow, they will bounce. (ALH)



Swarming ants in the middle of winter?

Larger Yellow Ant, is a common ant species found in this area. And, although it seems strange, each year many people bring these ants into the extension office during some of Nebraska's coldest weather. Normally, these ants are soil-nesting ants that make their nests under logs, rocks, porches and patios. They are also found in the soil of crawl spaces under homes, under concrete slabs and near the foundation. The workers gather "honeydew" from aphids or mealybugs to feed the colony. Workers are not usually found in the home. They are most active at night during warmer months.

Larger Yellow Ants are most easily recognized by their yellow-orange color and the fact that they give off a lemon or citronella odor when crushed. These ants are sometimes called "citronella ants". The odor can be quite strong and is easily recognizable.

The Larger Yellow Ant becomes a pest in the fall when mixed colonies of winged swarmer and wingless worker ants move toward buildings and enter through cracks in the

foundation. The ants create a temporary indoor, winter nest that may be somewhere in the basement or foundation slab under a loose brick or board or in a crack in the wall or floor. During this time, the ants do not forage for food through the house and apparently cause very little damage except to create piles of dirt at the entrance to the nest. Reportedly, these ants try to return to the outdoors sometime in the early spring if left undisturbed.

Control of larger yellow ants is not critical, since they cause little damage other than the annoyance of their presence. Ants found indoors in the winter can be vacuumed or swept up and discarded. If their temporary nests are uncovered, these can be sprayed, if desired, with a household insecticide. Baits are not effective on these ants and are usually unnecessary. Control outdoors is of little benefit; however, a residual insecticide used as a barrier around the home in the fall may reduce some accidental invasion. Always read and follow the label directions on any insecticide carefully. (SC)