

## Bed Bugs Invaders from the past.....



Bed bugs, showing size in relation to a human arm and finger



Bed bug shown on the surface of a human arm

### Bed Bugs, Myth or Reality?

Many of us have heard the expression "don't let the bed bugs bite" while being tucked into bed as a child, but are these frightening sounding creatures real or not? The truth is, they are real and they are once again starting to become a pest problem in the United States.

During world war II and in the following years, bed bug populations in the United States declined dramatically, mainly due to the use of DDT. Yet, they could still be readily found around the globe in other parts of the world.

Today, in the United States, bed bugs are making a grand comeback. Every year more and more cases are being reported in homes, hospitals, schools, etc. Basically anywhere humans can be found, bed bugs will go and establish populations. They can be spread simply by hitching a ride on their human hosts and depositing themselves at a new location.

#### *How can I recognize them?*

Adult bed bugs are not microscopic. As you can see in the picture at the top left corner, they are small reddish-brown insects about the size of a tick that can be readily seen with the human eye. They are wingless and cannot fly. The nymphs are similar looking to the adults, but they are smaller and lighter in color.

They have flattened bodies that allow them to fit in tight spaces. They are most active at night which makes it easier to feed on their sleeping victims. During the day time, they find a nice place to hide out. They can commonly be found between mattresses and box springs, between a picture frame and a wall, under couch cushions, etc. They like to hang out together, so it's not uncommon to find a group of them in one hiding spot.

#### *Signs and Symptoms*

The first question we should ask ourselves in pest management is "what pest are we dealing with?"

Some signs and symptoms that you may have a bed bug problem would be finding multiple red bumps on your body that weren't there when you went to sleep. This is a key issue because "red bumps" could be from anything. Do not assume that you have bed bugs until you actually find one, or have multiple other signs of an infestation to corroborate any bumps. Other signs of an infestation include finding blood spots (where they've accidentally been crushed), and/or excrement. If there are multiple little black stains on mattresses, walls, couches, or any where else that just seem to keep appearing, you may have an infestation. If you feel that you have a problem, there are some strategies that you can employ on your own to reduce populations.

### *School Problems*

Bed bugs have just recently become a concern for school systems although it is no surprise considering the number of people coming and going every day. As with any other situation, bed bugs hitch a ride on a piece of clothing, a backpack, in a purse, etc. They simply crawl off and onto a new host and are either taken to a new home, or take up residence in classrooms.

### *Management Strategies*

First and foremost is cleanliness. Piles of clutter that sit around a living are great places for bed bugs (and other pests) to hide in. Anything that can be laundered, should be immediately. That includes: sheets, blankets and pillow cases. High temperatures like those found in the dryer kill all stages of bed bugs. Items that cannot be laundered that appear infested should be thrown away. Mattresses that appear infested can be covered with a special insect-proof cover or may be discarded at the owner's discretion. Cracks and crevices between baseboards and other places can be caulked to eliminate shelter for them. Because of the many hiding places available to bed bugs, it can be hard to get rid of them all. In situations where bed bugs are positively known to be the problem, it's best to hire a knowledgeable pest management company to investigate the

Photos by Dr. Wayne Clark, Auburn University

problem. It may take several visits to determine problem areas and decide on the best courses of action.



Bed Bug Adult

### **Did You Know?**

Bed bugs have a look-alike who they are easily confused for! Their look-alike is named the bat bug and as its name indicates, prefers to feed on bats, not humans. Sometimes if bats get into building spaces like attics, they bring bat bugs with them that sometimes crawl downwards into the rooms below. One difference between them is that the bat bug is hairier than the bed bug.



Bat Bug Adult

For further information about Alabama's IPM program, Please contact:  
**Dr. L.C. "Fudd" Graham**  
(334) 844-2563  
fgraham@acesag.auburn.edu or  
**Krystal Waltman**  
waltmkg@auburn.edu

