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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

TUESDAY, August 15, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "INSECT QUESTIONS." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture.

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In this week's question bag are several inquiries about common insects. A couple of letters here ask about spiders in this house. Then one housekeeper writes that she's having a good deal of trouble with wasps. Another is worried by yellow jackets. And finally there's a letter from a lady who says that along in August every year crickets get into her house and do a lot of damage, even eat holes in her clothes.

Spiders, wasps, yellow jackets and crickets--that's quite an array of insects to discuss all in one day. But let's try. And let's start with the questions about spiders.

Here's the first one: "My children have been troubled by some sort of insect bites lately and my neighbor suggests that perhaps they are spider bites. Occasionally I find spiders in the house but not many. Will you tell me whether many of our common spiders are poisonous--that is, would bites from them be dangerous?"

Answer: Department of Agriculture entomologists say that very few spiders will bite; in fact, most of the spiders that get into homes haven't strong enough jaws to pierce the skin, and haven't any active poison glands. The black widow spider is the only dangerous species in this country but it rarely enters houses and is a shy creature and hard to irritate into biting anyway except when accidentally crushed against the skin. So the insect-bites you mention are not likely to be spider bites. And you can set your mind at rest about danger from common house spiders. The entomologists consider spiders as helpful insects because they prey on flies, mosquitoes and other insect pests.

Now here's a letter from a housekeeper who wants to get rid of spiders, not because she's afraid they'll bite, but because she doesn't like the webs they build in corners, on furniture and so on.

The entomologists say that the young of the common house spider get into the house through the screens or around loose-fitting windows and doors. If your house is near a trash pile, old lumber or brick piles, or wood sheds, where spiders have an undisturbed place to breed, more of these insects are likely to get into your house. And, if you have no basement, spiders are likely to gather in the space under the house. You can kill spiders in such places by spraying with creosote oil, though this oil has a rather strong odor and will stain paint and kill any plants it touches.

However, if you screen both your house and basement carefully, this is a big help toward keeping out spiders. Brush down all webs around the house and crush the spiders immediately. Take special care to get rid of the white egg cocoons that spiders fasten under furniture. If these are not destroyed numbers of small spiders will soon hatch out. Wall-cleaning attachments on vacuum cleaners are useful in removing webs and destroying spiders.

Now to answer the listeners who inquired about wasps and yellow jackets.

Various kinds of wasps, yellow jackets and hornets are sometimes troublesome because they build nests in or around houses and occasionally sting people who disturb these nests. Some also have the annoying habit of entering houses late in the fall seeking places for shelter.

But on the whole, wasps like spiders, are helpful insects. This is especially true of the wasps that build open paper nests, because these wasps destroy large numbers of caterpillars. So don't destroy this type of wasp unless their nests are in the house or somewhere where they may be annoyed into stinging. Remember that wasps seldom sting unless they are disturbed.

The wasps that build mud houses are not nearly so vicious as the yellow jackets and hornets. Yellow jackets and hornets also sometimes injure ripe fruit and sometimes cause considerable damage in orchards.

If wasps have built nests in the house, the way to get rid of them is to knock the nests down and spray the place with cresol compound or fly spray.

You can destroy yellow jackets nests in the ground by pouring about a cup of carbon tetrachloride in the hole and covering the hole with earth. The time to do this is in the evening when the insects are all in the nest. Fly sprays, too, if applied with a compressed air sprayer, will help clean up wasp nests.

Now about crickets. The cricket is not normally a household pest. But as food becomes scarce late in the summer, crickets may come into houses, sometimes in great numbers. This often happens, too, when houses are near refuse heaps. Crickets get into the house through small openings in walls, or through windows and doors that are not well-screened.

The first step in keeping out crickets is to close all openings into the house and make sure that screens, windows and doors are tight. Then you can use any good commercial fly spray to kill all the crickets it hits. Fresh pyrethrum powder liberally dusted on the floor along the baseboards and blown into cracks will kill enormous numbers of crickets. You can also use a poison bait.

But near city dumps where garbage is left open for these insects to feed on, homes are always likely to have trouble with crickets. Here it is up to the community to treat the dump so that crickets will not increase and multiply there.

That's all the questions today. More next Tuesday.

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