

# Down the Garden Path



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Plant & Pest Diagnostic Laboratory

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## HOME

### Springtime Invasion of Tiny Red "Bugs"

*Timothy J. Gibb,  
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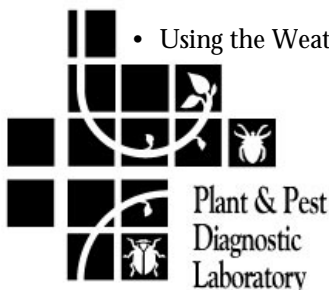
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Plant & Pest  
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There seem to be a lot of homes throughout the state which are being invaded by very tiny red "BUGS" that crawl on the walls and curtains. These are clover mites and can become an annoying household pest, especially in and around homes where new lawns are being established or where there's a heavy growth of well-fertilized grass close to foundation walls.

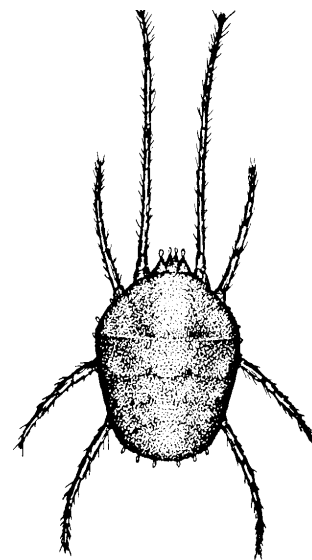
The mites are very tiny creatures (smaller than a pin head) and may occur in countless numbers. They usually appear first around windows, but later may overrun the entire home. They do not bite people or cause any damage indoors, but are extremely annoying and will leave a red stain when crushed.

Clover mites feed on grasses, clovers, and certain other plants in the lawn and around the home. They often crawl into cracks and crevices to molt and lay eggs. Typical "hiding places" are under the loose bark of trees, on foundation walls, beneath siding, and around window frames.

Clover mites are most abundant in the spring and fall and are relatively inactive during the hot summer months and again during cold weather. They will migrate into homes either when population pressure becomes too great or when feeding conditions become unfavorable, such as the onset of hot or cold weather.

Once inside a home, clover mites are difficult to control. Although those present can be killed with certain sprays, more are likely to show up. Thus, prevention is better than cure—that is, keeping the mites from ever entering the home. Following are preventive and control measures that have proven to be effective.

1. Grass and shrubbery growing against foundation walls make it easy for mites to get from lawn to house. To prevent easy access, lay a barrier of pea gravel 18-24 inches wide along the foundation walls. If pea gravel is not practical, leave bare soil or use flower beds as the barrier.



Adult clover mite.

-- continues --

2. Spray both barrier strip and foundation walls with a miticide. Where possible, also treat the inside of the foundation walls, including the plates and areas above them. If there is no barrier strip, treat foundation walls and the grass itself for a distance of 10-20 feet outward from the walls. Some of the miticides effective and safe for use under conditions described are Dursban, Diazinon, and Malathion (Malathion may have a shorter residual action and be ineffective when weather is cool). The proper spray concentration will depend on whether or not flowers and shrubs are in the area to be treated. Follow label directions closely.
3. At first sign of mite invasion, paint or spray window channels and outside frames with a labelled formulation of one of the miticides. Also treat any other obvious entrance points. Repeat as necessary.
4. Mites indoors can be killed with a spray containing synergized pyrethrins; but direct contact is necessary, and permanent protection cannot be assured.
5. In situations where mites are especially difficult to control, consider the services of a commercial pest control specialist. ☺

## GARDEN

### Healthy Bulb Foliage Encourages Next Year's Blossoms

*B. Rosie Lerner,  
Extension Consumer Horticulture Specialist*

Spring flowering bulbs bring a dazzling display of blossoms that help chase away the winter doldrums. But as those flowers fade, the foliage that remains is not very attractive and in some cases is downright unsightly! But resist the urge to cut those green leaves off the plants.

The health of this year's foliage will determine the amount of carbohydrates that will be stored in the bulb below ground this fall. These stored reserves in turn determine the strength of the blooms for next spring.

Some gardeners attempt to "tidy" up the foliage by gathering the leaves into bundles and either braiding or tying them in a knot. Although it is better than removing the foliage, the leaves that are inside the bundle will not be exposed to light, thus reducing photosynthesis and future blooming potential.

As the blooms fade, you should cut the flower stalk off to prevent seed formation which uses up food reserves that are better spent on bulb growth. However, help the foliage thrive by providing plenty of sunshine, a pinch of fertilizer, and water when the weather is dry. When the bulb foliage begins to turn



yellow or brown, you can remove the leaves and add them to your compost pile. Tulip foliage generally dies back by mid-June, but daffodil foliage can remain green until mid-summer.

You can make the bulb foliage less noticeable by interplanting with perennial and annual flowers. Interplanting will also help keep the bed interesting long after the bulb flowers fade. Select plants that bloom at different times in spring and summer to keep the bed in color throughout the season. Plants such as candytuft, false rock-rose, and lamb's ear provide early color and texture, yet stay low to the ground so that they provide an attractive background for bulb flowers. Plants such as daylilies, coreopsis, and many annual flowers grow a bit taller in late spring and summer and so can provide a good screen to mask the bulb foliage. ☺

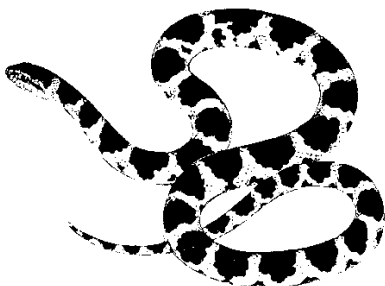
## OVER THE BACK FENCE

**Q:** Is there anything you can recommend to a homeowner who has a dark-colored snake frequenting her backyard and garden and scaring her to death? Any means of repelling the snake?

**A:** The snake in question is probably an eastern garter snake. These (and most other snakes in Indiana) are non-poisonous, non-aggressive, and for the most part harmless. We need to remember the beneficial aspects of snakes and TRY to adjust to their presence rather than remove them. When you see a snake, just ignore it if you can. If you truly dislike them, just compose yourself or take a coffee break for 10 minutes when it visits. When you return, it is likely to be gone.

The highest number of people-snake encounters occurs this time of the year due to the cool moist days. The snake will forage during the warm sunny part of

day. As temperatures continue to rise this spring, however, snakes will not be active during the warmer parts of the day. Timing yard work and activities around snake activity may reduce the opportunities for encounters.



Most repellents have not fared well against keeping snakes away. However, if the snake seems to be visiting one particular area of the yard, at least for now, moth flakes placed in approximately the same path as it slithers might deter it from using the area. This application would have to be repeated every couple of days.

If you are really ophidiaphobic (paranoid of snakes) you might surround the specific area where you are working each day with a fine mesh hardware cloth fence, so at least you are protected from encountering the snake while working in the garden.

-- Bobby Corrigan ☺

**Q:** If I want to do it myself, how do I calculate the amount of nitrogen to apply to a garden, lawn, or flower bed?

**A:** The percentage of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium in a fertilizer is prominently displayed on the label. To calculate how much nitrogen is in a bag, multiply the first number by the total weight of the bag and then divide by the number of thousand square feet your lawn occupies. For instance, a 35 pound bag of 14-5-5 fertilizer contains 5 pounds of nitrogen ( $35 \times .14 = 5$ ). If you apply this to your 1,000 square garden you will have applied 50 lb. N/1000 square feet. -- Zac Reicher ☺

## THE GRAPE VINE

### Conserving Natural Enemies of Armored and Soft Scales on Trees

*Cliff Sadof,*

*Extension Entomologist*

Most armored and soft scale problems occur in landscapes when site conditions become hostile to natural enemies, and favorable to scales. Maximize the use of local natural enemies by adopting strategies that consider plant health, and the sensitivity of scales and their natural enemies to pesticides. First, improve plant health by adopting proper watering and fertilization practices. Then, start monitoring trees for live scales and natural enemies starting in the dormant season. Check twigs, branches, and trunks for the presence of living soft and armored scales by scraping your thumb across a scale infested twig. If alive, crushed scales will be full of fluid. Scale covers of armored scales can be flipped over to look for live fleshy crawlers beneath the cover. The presence of maggot like larvae, or pupae inside scales indicates parasitoid activity. Scale skins or covers should be examined for the presence of round parasitoid emergence holes.

Dormant season application of horticultural oil is advisable when natural enemy activity is low and where many live scales are present. Although oil may kill some parasitoids that overwinter in the scales, oil only kills the insects it covers and does not affect natural enemies that arrive after it dries. Note that oils are most effective on scales that overwinter as immatures or fertilized females. Those which overwinter as eggs, such as oystershell scale and pine needle scale are not killed in the dormant season by oils.

Inspect plants when scale crawlers are supposed to emerge. If crawlers are abundant, apply a verdant spray of soap or oil during the peak of crawler emergence. As with the dormant spray, this action will help to reduce scale numbers while minimizing negative impact on beneficials. The inspection process should be repeated in two weeks to determine if significantly more crawlers have emerged and a second application of soap or oil is needed. Repeat this inspection and treatment decision making process for each generation of scale crawlers.

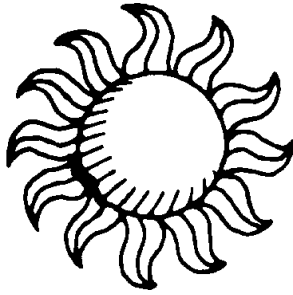
When heavy infestations have caused significant branch dieback, more drastic rescue measures are needed. If the tree is a vigorous grower, consider pruning out and destroying the most heavily infested branches before initiating the crawler or dormant spray. As a last resort, apply a half rate of broad spectrum insecticide with 1% insecticidal soap during one crawler period to lower the pest population and reduce tree stress. Although this can reduce local numbers of natural enemies, they may return later if use of these materials is avoided. ☺



## Using the Weather Update

Timothy J. Gibb,

Extension Entomology Specialist



In the DtGP issue dated April 14, 1994, we discussed how temperature can influence when insect pests become active. During years when it is relatively warm, insects and plants emerge sooner than those years when it is cool. The following weather update provides a measure of how warm it has been in your particular area so you can better predict when pests are likely to become active.

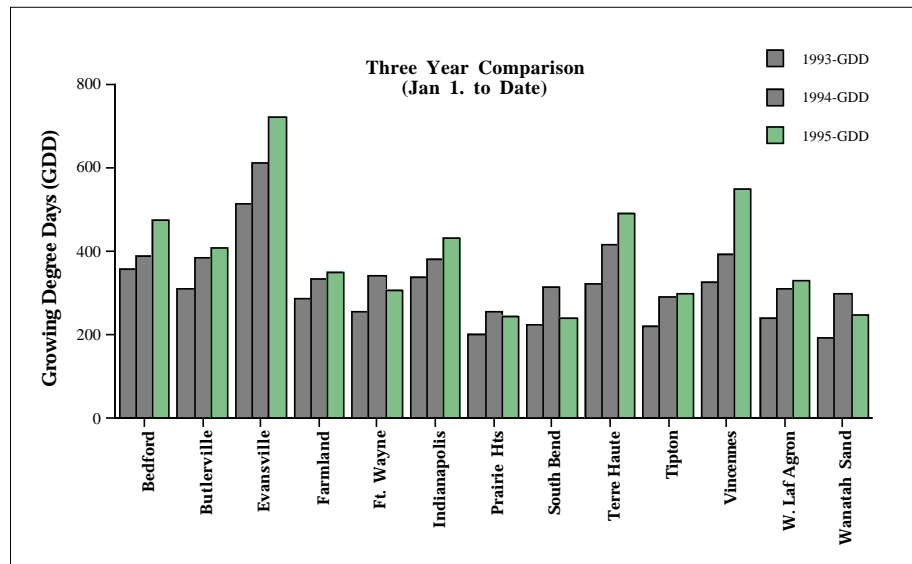
The weather update keeps track of how warm it has been by using degree days. The number of degree days is just the sum of "development" accumulated since January 1. It assumes that no insect development occurs when temperatures are below 50°F. It also assumes that insects do not develop any faster after the temperature exceeds 86°F. As the season progresses, predictions of when certain pests will occur will be based on growing degree accumulations.

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