1993

G93-1131 Clover Mites and Their Management

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G93-1131-A

NebGuide

Published by Cooperative Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Clover Mites and Their Management

This guide describes the life cycle of clover mites and offers strategies for controlling them.

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Clover mites are common nuisance pests in Nebraska, often invading homes and other properties in enormous numbers. These tiny pests are most troublesome in early spring and again in fall, especially on the east and south sides of buildings. Also, they frequently appear on window sills during the winter months, on relatively warm, calm, sunny days. The clover mite is not an insect but is a relative of spiders and ticks. The full-grown clover mite is slightly smaller than a pin head and has a reddish to reddish-brown body. They appear as dark red specks crawling around windows, drapes, curtains and furniture.

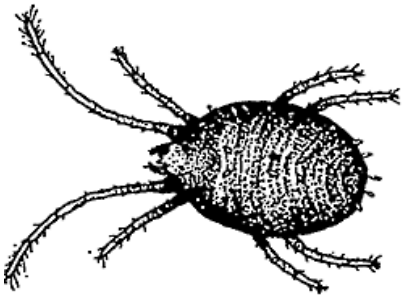

Figure 1. Clover Mite.
(Art by Jim Kalisch, Department of Entomology)

Clover mites do not damage buildings and furnishings, nor do they injure humans and pets. However, they stain fabrics with excrement and can leave rusty or reddish spots when accidentally crushed. They may, on rare occasion, cause injury to some indoor plants.

Clover mites feed by sucking sap from various plants. They generally attack clover, lawn and other grasses, various trees, ornamental plants and shrubs. These mites invade homes or other buildings in large numbers by entering through cracks around windows and doorways, in floors and walls, or under siding.

Life History

The most characteristic feature of the clover mite is the pair of front legs, which are longer than the body and twice the length of other legs. Adult mites have four pairs of legs. Female clover mites reproduce parthenogenetically (without fertilization). Males have not been found in the United States, and only rarely in other parts of the world. In adverse climatic conditions, clover mites in the egg stage either hibernate (overwinter) or aestivate (become dormant during summer) under tree bark, in cracks of fence posts and foundation walls, under sheathing of buildings or in other dry protected sites. The eggs do not hatch below 40°F or above 86°F. Each female lays about 70 eggs. After eggs hatch, the newly emerged immature mites move to find hosts, molt, and pass through two nymphal stages. Approximately 30 days are required to complete a generation outdoors. One generation is completed during the spring or early summer months and another in the early fall (September/October).

Management Strategies

Nonchemical Control

1. Control or removal of grasses and weeds in an 18-24 inch wide strip around foundations will reduce mite populations. Regular mowing of lawns and trimming of excess shrubbery next to foundations will also minimize the buildup of mites.
2. An 18-36 inch band (barrier) of gravel/marbles, sand, lava rock, wood chips or worked soil used in landscaping around foundations will substantially reduce the migration of mites into buildings. Clover mites generally have difficulty crossing such barriers.
3. Many flowers and plants are not attractive to clover mites and can be planted in cleared areas to serve as barriers to mite movement from the lawn into the building. Some examples are: petunias, salvias, geraniums, chrysanthemums, roses, zinnias, yews, arborvitaes, junipers, and spruce. Juniper and spruce are attacked by other mite species and should be used with caution.
4. Indoors, clover mite populations can be controlled by using a vacuum cleaner or moist dust cloth. Avoid crushing or smearing the mites, especially on fabrics.

Chemical Control

Several insecticides/miticides are available to the general public for controlling clover mites, including:

- acephate (Orthene®)
- chlorpyrifos (Dursban®)
- diazinon
- dicofol (Kelthane®)
- malathion
- pyrethrins
- resmethrin
- Insecticidal soaps

Outdoor Treatment: Insecticide sprays should be applied in a band 10-15 feet wide around the building foundation and on the lower portions of the outside walls. Spray thoroughly around doors, windows, window-wells and vegetation.

Indoor Treatment: Clover mites that have entered the building can be controlled by spraying baseboards, doorways, window edges, areas between screen and storm windows and other entry points. Repeat the treatment if necessary.

Safety Notes

- READ, UNDERSTAND, AND FOLLOW ALL PESTICIDE LABEL DIRECTIONS AND PRECAUTIONS.
- Keep all pesticides in their original containers.
- Do not allow anyone near treated surfaces until dry, and keep all pesticides out of reach of children and pets.
- Do not contaminate food and water.

If clover mite problems persist, seek assistance from a commercial pest control operator.

File G1131 under: INSECTS AND PESTS
G-8, Household Pests
Issued January 1993; 5,000 printed.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Elbert C. Dickey, Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.