

Diane C. Zahorsky, horticulturist in the Freehold Township office of the Rutgers University Cooperative Extension, holds a leaf with two brown marmorated stink bugs on it. Zahorsky said reports of the insect in the area are growing. (STAFF PHOTO: TANYA BREEN)

## Little brown bug is creating a stink

If you step on one, be prepared for the odor

BY JOSEPH SAPIA • STAFF WRITER • OCTOBER 27, 2008

With cold weather arriving, a small pest may work its way indoors from the vegetable garden.

Beware! Handle *Halyomorpha halys* gently. Crushing this 3/4-inch-long, speckled brown-gray insect with striped antennas may unleash a pungent smell, suggested by its common name — the brown marmorated stink bug. "Last fall, there were just a few (reports)," Diane C. Zahorsky, horticulturist in the Freehold Township office of the Rutgers University Cooperative Extension, said last week. "This spring, there were a lot more. "Then, I would say, the last week in September, we started to get more reports than we've ever gotten. And it's continued." Outside Zahorsky's office, at the Monmouth County Master Gardener telephone help line, a board announces hot topics. The hottest topic, based on the size of the lettering, was the brown marmorated stink bug.



Bruce McInerney walked into the extension office with a small plastic bag holding one dead brown marmorated stink bug, along with a few live carpet beetles — seeking confirmation of the beetles' identity and identification of the stink bug. McInerney found the specimens on a construction job he was working in the Trenton area. But he first noticed the unknown species — as it turns out, the brown marmorated stink bug — at his Shrewsbury home about a year ago. "I've never seen them prior to that," McInerney said.

If the bug was not recognizable, it is understandable. The brown marmorated stink bug, native to eastern Asia, was first found in the United States in Allentown, Pa., in 1996, according to Rutgers. Three years later, it was first recorded in New Jersey — in Hunterdon County. Now, the brown marmorated stink bug lives from New York to Virginia and west to Ohio, along with populations in Mississippi, Portland, Ore., and Los Angeles. New Jersey has a handful of native stink bugs, with the green species the most recognizable to the public, said George C. Hamilton, a Rutgers pest-management specialist. "We don't see them, generally, in the numbers we see the brown marmorated stink bugs," Hamilton said. "They don't go inside structures. If anything, they're a pest for farmers." And some of the natives do not eat vegetation, only eating other insects, Hamilton said. The concern over the brown marmorated stink bug — the only non-native stink bug in New Jersey that Hamilton is aware of — is how, as a vegetation eater, it could affect commercial crops because of its large numbers, according to Rutgers. In feeding, it uses a proboscis to suck nourishment from vegetation — and damage it in the process. "It's a new pest, and we don't know if it's going to be an 'economic pest,'" Zahorsky said.

Because the outlook is unclear, Rutgers is tracking it. Rutgers asks the public to report brown marmorated stink bugs and, if possible, collect a few in a container filled with rubbing alcohol, drop them off at an extension office or mail them to the extension service laboratory. "We first saw them (in Monmouth County) last fall," Zahorsky said. "People called, and we had gotten the fact sheet already, so we were on the lookout." Recent calls were taken from around the county for hundreds of the stink bugs, Zahorsky said.

In mid-October, master gardener Lynn Trela collected two at her Holmdel home and brought them to the Freehold Township extension office. "I wanted to confirm what they were," Trela said. "I had known Rutgers University was interested in monitoring them throughout

the state." On recent days, Trela has seen perhaps 25 to 30 on her house's cedar-shake siding. "Right now, we consider it a nuisance pest, because it's not doing any (major) damage," Zahorsky said.

Indoor pests - The nuisance also could affect nongardening homeowners. While the brown marmorated stink bug does not bite humans or cause damage to structures, it may choose a house to spend the winter in, Zahorsky said. "They crawl into any crack in the house," Zahorsky said. "They'll come into the house, and that's when people'll notice them." The two Trela brought to the extension office "literally fell off my back door onto my kitchen floor," she said.

Consider not squishing the bug. It could release its odor from scent glands on its abdomen. Crushing the dead one McInerney brought to the extension office seemed to produced an organic smell — like wet leaves. "To me, it smells like a green plant smell," Hamilton said. "To some people, it is offensive. To others, it doesn't bother them." Trela crushed a few of the ones she found. "To me, it's more a vegetative odor," Trela said. "I didn't think these were as obnoxious as others (that are native) I've caught in the past." "It's just an unpleasant odor," said Denise Corrigan Dunne, a master gardener from Marlboro. "It's not overwhelming or anything. This smelled like exhaust or something unpleasant like that."

### **Protective odor**

The scent is to ward off predators, such as other insects or birds, Hamilton said. "It's recommended you sweep them up or vacuum them up and take them outside," Zahorsky said. Or be proactive — caulk openings where they could get passage, along with removing or covering window air-conditioning units, according to Zahorsky. While native stink bugs can be controlled with pesticides, it is unclear how that control would work for the brown marmorated stink bug. Rutgers recommends some pesticide ingredients, but notes formulated pesticides have not been evaluated. "What homeowners tell me is they spray it with insecticide, and it doesn't affect them at all," Zahorsky said. "Some people say it's like giving them a shot of vitamins."

This winter, Zahorsky expects to hear from the public about the brown marmorated stink bug inside homes. The public's curiosity about one or two of the mysterious bugs inside during the winter may change to calls about hundreds seen outside in the spring. "You wouldn't notice it outside if there were just one or two," Zahorsky said. "But, when you see hundreds coming on your deck or house, people start to panic." Not to worry — so far. "It's nothing to panic about," Zahorsky said. "It's just something relatively new to the area." "Knowledge is power if you know what it is," Corrigan Dunne said. "I don't want to scare the public — you can handle it."

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### **BROWN MARMORATED STINK BUG**

A non-native species, the insect was first found in the United States in Allentown, Pa., in 1996, then in New Jersey three years later. Rutgers University tracks the species, which feeds on vegetation, because of concerns that it could affect fruit and vegetable crops.

Sightings may be reported to Rutgers University at: the Department of Entomology, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 93 Lipman Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8524, Attention: BMSB Reports.

Information on the species is available from area Rutgers Cooperative Extension offices: (732) 431-7260 in Freehold Township or (732) 349-1246 in Toms River, or [njaes.rutgers.edu/stinkbug](http://njaes.rutgers.edu/stinkbug) on the Web.