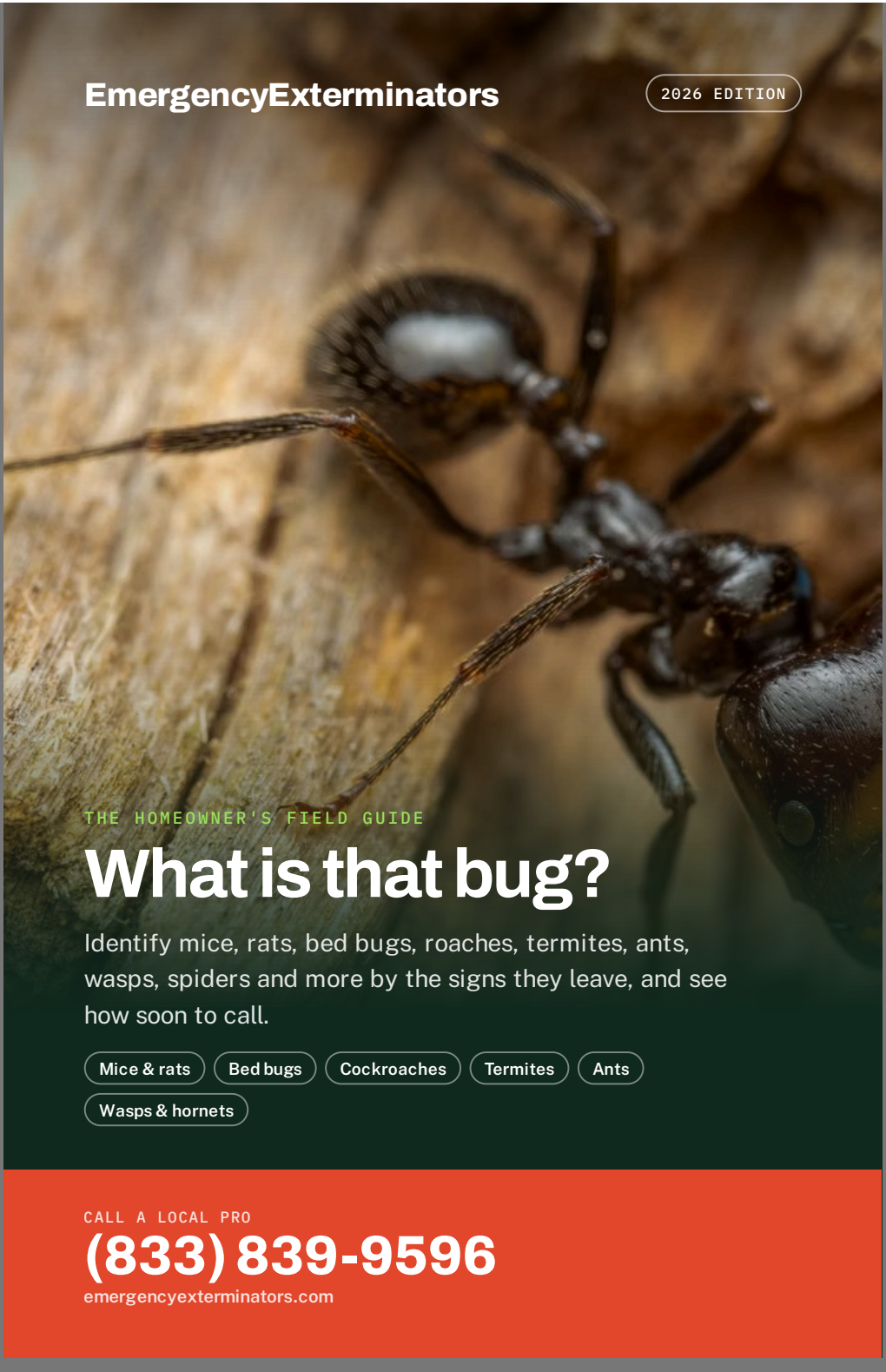

EmergencyExterminators

2026 EDITION

THE HOMEOWNER'S FIELD GUIDE

What is that bug?

Identify mice, rats, bed bugs, roaches, termites, ants, wasps, spiders and more by the signs they leave, and see how soon to call.

Mice & rats | Bed bugs | Cockroaches | Termites | Ants | Wasps & hornets

CALL A LOCAL PRO

(833) 839-9596

emergencyexterminators.com

WELCOME

Keep this guide where you can find it fast

Problems at home rarely wait for a good moment. This guide helps you recognize what's going on, decide how fast to act and know what to do in the first few minutes.

1. **Start with the sign.** The "Identify it by the sign you found" page matches what you see to the likely problem.
2. **Check the urgency.** Every problem carries a color: ● Call today, ● Call this week, ● Not urgent.
3. **Do the first steps.** Each problem lists what to do right now, while you call.

⚠ **Safety first.** General guidance only. For a sting with trouble breathing, call 911 first. We cover insects, spiders, scorpions, mice and rats only.

ONE CALL CONNECTS YOU WITH AN INDEPENDENT LOCAL COMPANY

(833) 839-9596

INSIDE

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AT A GLANCE

How urgent is it?

A quick way to sort the problem in front of you.

Call today

- Mice & rats
- Bed bugs
- Cockroaches
- Wasps & hornets
- Scorpions

Call this week

- Termites
- Ants
- Spiders
- Fleas & ticks
- Mosquitoes

Not urgent

- Stink bugs & fall invaders

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START HERE

Identify it by the sign you found

Most people find a sign before they see the pest. Find yours, then turn to that pest.

WHAT YOU NOTICE	MOST LIKELY	PAGE
Droppings like grains of rice in cabinets	**Mice**	6
Scratching in walls or the ceiling at night	**Mice or rats**	6
Itchy bites in a line after sleeping	**Bed bugs**	8
Small rust spots on sheets or the mattress	**Bed bugs**	8
Fast brown bugs in the kitchen at night	**Cockroaches**	10
Piles of tiny wings near windows	**Termite swarmers**	12
Mud tubes on the foundation	**Termites**	12
Sawdust piles under wood trim	**Carpenter ants**	14
A papery nest under the eaves	**Wasps or hornets**	16
Pets scratching constantly	**Fleas**	20
Bugs clustered on sunny walls in fall	**Stink bugs or lady beetles**	26
Shiny black spider with a red mark	**Black widow**	18



01 CALL TODAY

PEST 1 OF 11

Mice & rats

SIZE
Mice 2.5–4 in., rats 7–10 in. plus tail

FOUND IN
Kitchens, pantries, under sinks, attics, garages and inside walls.

What it looks like

Gray or brown fur, large ears (mice), thick scaly tail (rats). Droppings: mice the size of a grain of rice, rats closer to a raisin.

Prevent it next time

- Seal gaps around pipes, vents and doors.
- Store food in glass or metal containers.
- Keep firewood away from the house.

Often confused with

Rat vs mouse: rats are much bigger with blunt noses and thick tails; young rats have big heads and feet.

Signs to look for

- Droppings along walls and in cabinets
- Gnaw marks on food packages and wires
- Scratching in walls or ceilings at night
- Greasy rub marks along baseboards

Do this now

1. Store food in glass or metal containers.
2. Don't sweep droppings dry: spray with disinfectant, then wipe.

What the pro will do

1. Finds activity and entry points.
2. Sets traps or bait stations safely.
3. Seals gaps and schedules follow-ups.

> Call today. Mice and rats breed fast and can chew wiring.

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02 CALL TODAY

PEST 2 OF 11

Bed bugs

SIZE
About 1/4 in. (apple seed)

FOUND IN
Mattress seams, box springs, headboards, couch cushions and luggage.

What it looks like

Flat, oval, reddish-brown and wingless. Rounder and darker after feeding. Young ones are pale and tiny.

Prevent it next time

- Inspect luggage after trips.
- Check secondhand furniture first.
- Use mattress encasements.

Often confused with

Carpet beetles and young cockroaches. Bed bugs are flat, wingless and hide in mattress seams.

Signs to look for

- Itchy bites in lines or clusters, often after travel
- Tiny rust or black spots on sheets
- Shed skins in mattress seams
- A sweet, musty smell in heavy cases

Do this now

1. Wash and dry bedding on high heat.
2. Don't move furniture to other rooms or throw it out yet.

What the pro will do

1. Inspects beds, furniture and outlets.
2. Treats with heat or targeted methods.
3. Follows up to confirm they're gone.

Call soon. Bed bugs spread room to room and rarely go away on their own.

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03 CALL TODAY

PEST 3 OF 11

Cockroaches

SIZE

German 1/2 in., American up to 2 in.

FOUND IN

Kitchens and bathrooms: behind appliances, under sinks, in cabinets and drains.

What it looks like

German: light brown with two dark stripes behind the head. American: reddish-brown and much larger. They run fast when lights come on.

Prevent it next time

- Fix dripping taps and dry the sink at night.
- Seal gaps behind appliances.
- Take trash out daily.

Often confused with

Water bugs and ground beetles. Roaches are flatter, faster and have long, constantly moving antennae.

Signs to look for

- Roaches seen at night or in the daytime (a sign of a large population)
- Pepper-like droppings in drawers
- Egg cases behind appliances
- An oily, musty odor

Do this now

1. Wipe crumbs and grease, and fix dripping taps.
2. Skip bug bombs: they scatter roaches deeper into walls.

What the pro will do

1. Places baits and growth regulators.
2. Treats cracks and voids.
3. Follows up until activity stops.

Call soon. German cockroaches multiply quickly indoors.

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04 CALL THIS WEEK

PEST 4 OF 11

Termites

SIZE
1/4–1/2 in.

FOUND IN
Wood near the ground: sills, crawl spaces, porches, door frames and basements.

What it looks like

Workers are pale and soft-bodied. Swarmers are dark with two pairs of equal-length wings and a straight waist (ants have a pinched waist).

Prevent it next time

- Keep wood and mulch away from the foundation.
- Fix leaks and run a dehumidifier.
- Have the foundation inspected yearly.

Often confused with

Flying ants. Termites have straight waists, straight antennae and equal-length wings.

Signs to look for

- Winged swarmers or piles of shed wings near windows
- Pencil-width mud tubes on foundation walls
- Wood that sounds hollow when tapped
- Bubbling paint or tiny pellets (drywood termites)

Do this now

1. Keep a few swarmers in a sealed bag for the inspector.
2. Don't break open mud tubes or spray the wood.

What the pro will do

1. Inspects the foundation and wood.
2. Treats the soil or uses baits.
3. Monitors for return activity.

> Call this week for an inspection. Damage builds slowly but steadily.

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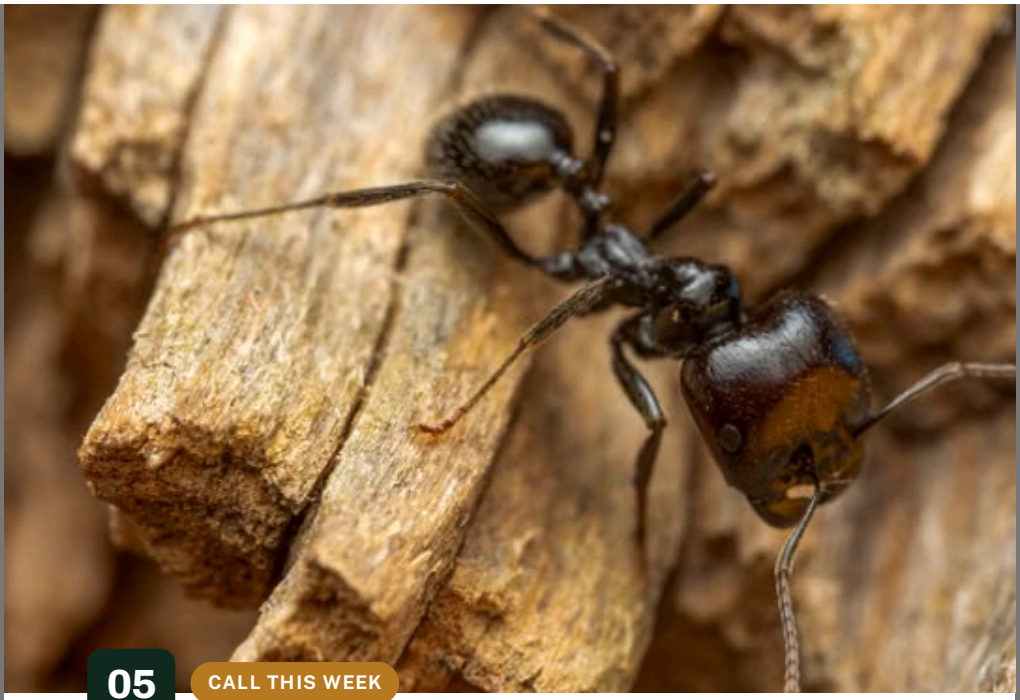

05 CALL THIS WEEK

PEST 5 OF 11

Ants

SIZE
1/16–1/2 in. (carpenter ants are the largest)

FOUND IN
Kitchen counters, windowsills, damp wood, lawns and along foundations.

What it looks like

Three body segments with a pinched waist and bent antennae. Carpenter ants are black or red-and-black; fire ants are reddish.

Prevent it next time

- Wipe trails with soapy water.
- Seal sweet foods and pet food.
- Trim plants touching the house.

Often confused with

Termite swarmers. Ants have a pinched waist, bent antennae and front wings longer than the back.

Signs to look for

- Trails of ants to food or water
- Fine sawdust piles below wood (carpenter ants)
- Dirt mounds in the yard (fire ants)
- Winged ants indoors in spring

Do this now

1. Wipe the trail with soapy water to remove the scent path.
2. Seal sugary food and pet food.

What the pro will do

1. Identifies the ant species.
2. Places baits or treats the nest.
3. Treats the perimeter.

> Call this week, sooner for carpenter ants or fire ants near kids and pets.

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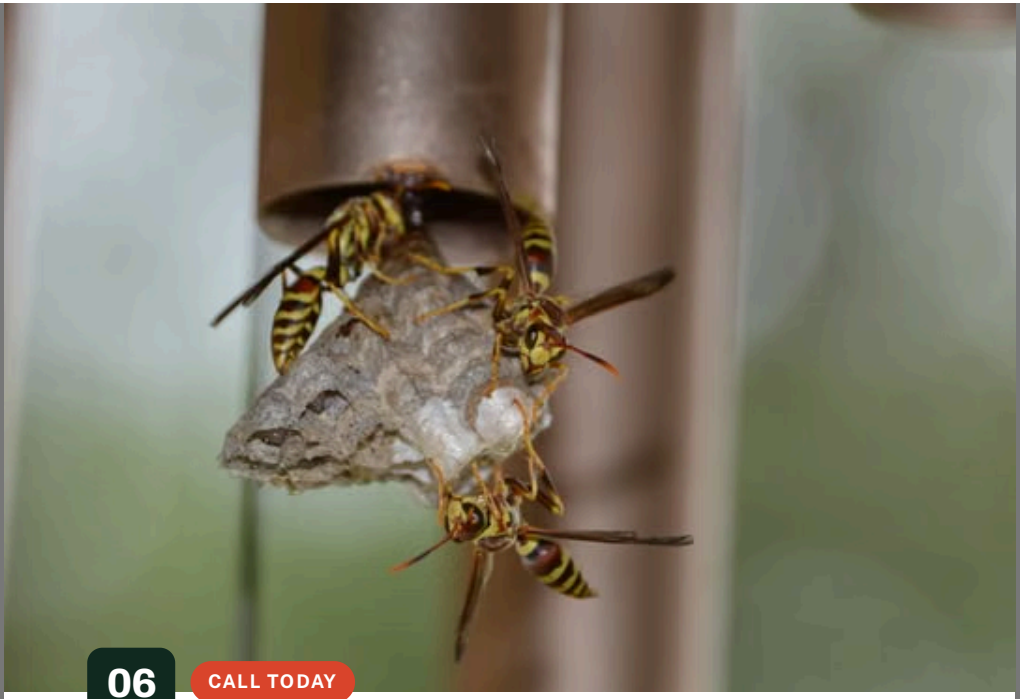

06 CALL TODAY

PEST 6 OF 11

Wasps & hornets

SIZE
1/2–1 1/2 in.

FOUND IN
Under eaves and decks, in sheds, shrubs, wall voids and ground holes (yellowjackets).

What it looks like

Smooth, shiny bodies with a narrow waist. Yellowjackets are black and yellow; paper wasps are slimmer with long dangling legs.

Prevent it next time

- Check eaves and decks in early spring.
- Seal gaps in siding and eaves.
- Keep trash and drinks covered outside.

Often confused with

Honey bees, which are fuzzy and golden-brown. Bees are protected in many areas and are handled differently.

Signs to look for

- A papery gray nest or open-comb nest
- Steady traffic in and out of a gap or ground hole
- Wasps inside near windows
- Chewing sounds inside a wall

Do this now

1. Keep people and pets away from the nest.
2. Never plug a nest hole; they may chew inside.

What the pro will do

1. Removes the nest with protective gear.
2. Treats the void if needed.
3. Checks for other nests nearby.

Call today if the nest is near a door or play area. Don't spray or seal it yourself.

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07 CALL THIS WEEK

PEST 7 OF 11

Spiders

SIZE
1/8 in. to 2 in. leg span

FOUND IN
Basements, garages, closets, window corners and stored boxes.

What it looks like

Eight legs and two body parts, no antennae. Black widows are shiny black with a red hourglass; brown recluses are tan with a violin-shaped mark.

Prevent it next time

- Reduce clutter in basements and garages.
- Shake out shoes and stored clothes.
- Seal gaps around windows and doors.

Often confused with

Wolf spiders and grass spiders are large but generally harmless. Check for the red hourglass or violin mark.

Signs to look for

- Webs in corners and window frames
- Egg sacs in quiet storage areas
- Many spiders indoors (often a sign of other bugs to feed on)
- A shiny black or tan violin-marked spider

Do this now

1. Shake out shoes, gloves and stored clothes.
2. Use sticky traps along walls to see what's around.

What the pro will do

1. Identifies risky species.
2. Treats corners, voids and the perimeter.
3. Reduces the insects spiders feed on.

> Call soon for black widows or brown recluses; otherwise when it suits you.

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08 CALL THIS WEEK

PEST 8 OF 11

Fleas & ticks

SIZE
Fleas 1/8 in., ticks 1/8–1/4 in.

FOUND IN
Pet bedding, carpets and rugs (fleas). Tall grass, woods edges and leaf litter (ticks).

What it looks like

Fleas: dark, flat side to side and quick jumpers. Ticks: flat, oval and eight-legged, swelling after feeding.

Prevent it next time

- Treat pets with your vet's advice.
- Vacuum and wash pet bedding often.
- Keep the yard trimmed.

Often confused with

Bed bug bites (fleas bite ankles; bed bugs bite while sleeping) and spider beetles.

Signs to look for

- Pets scratching or biting at their skin
- Small itchy bites around ankles
- Black specks (flea dirt) in pet bedding
- Ticks found on pets or people after time outdoors

Do this now

1. Vacuum daily and wash pet bedding hot.
2. Remove ticks with fine tweezers, pulling straight up.

What the pro will do

1. Treats indoor areas and the yard.
2. Coordinates timing with pet treatment.
3. Schedules a follow-up.

> Call this week, and treat pets with your vet's advice at the same time.

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09 CALL THIS WEEK

PEST 9 OF 11

Mosquitoes

SIZE
1/8–1/2 in.

FOUND IN
Shady yards, near standing water: gutters, birdbaths, plant saucers, tires and buckets.

What it looks like

Slender body, long thin legs and wings, and a long mouthpart. A high-pitched whine when close.

Prevent it next time

- Tip out standing water weekly.
- Clean gutters.
- Change birdbath water often.

Often confused with

Crane flies, which look like giant mosquitoes but don't bite.

Signs to look for

- Bites at dusk and dawn
- Larvae wriggling in standing water
- Many mosquitoes around shady shrubs
- Clogged gutters holding water

Do this now

1. Tip out standing water weekly.
2. Clean gutters and change birdbath water.

What the pro will do

1. Treats shrubs and resting areas.
2. Treats breeding sites.
3. Sets a seasonal schedule.

> Empty standing water now; call for a yard treatment before outdoor events.

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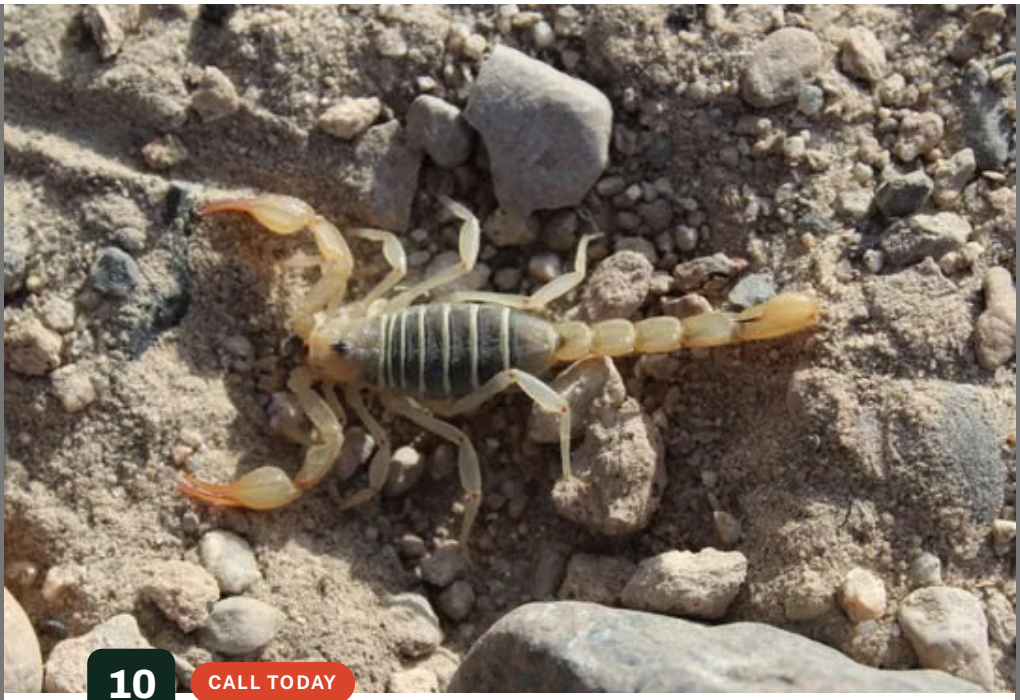

10 CALL TODAY

PEST 10 OF 11

Scorpions

SIZE
1–3 in.

FOUND IN
Arizona, Texas and the Southwest: under rocks, in block walls, garages, shoes and bedding.

What it looks like

Eight legs, two front pincers and a curled tail with a stinger. The Arizona bark scorpion is small, slim and tan.

Prevent it next time

- Seal gaps under doors and around pipes.
- Move beds away from walls.
- Shake out shoes and bedding.

Often confused with

Pseudoscorpions and whip scorpions, which are tiny or stingless. Any scorpion indoors is worth a call.

Signs to look for

- Scorpions found indoors, often at night
- Sightings in bathtubs, sinks or closets
- Stings with sharp pain and tingling
- Scorpions glowing under a UV flashlight outside

Do this now

1. Shake out shoes and bedding before use.
2. Move beds slightly away from walls.

What the pro will do

1. Inspects with UV light at night.
2. Treats the perimeter and voids.
3. Seals entry points.

Call today, especially with young children at home. Severe sting symptoms: call 911.

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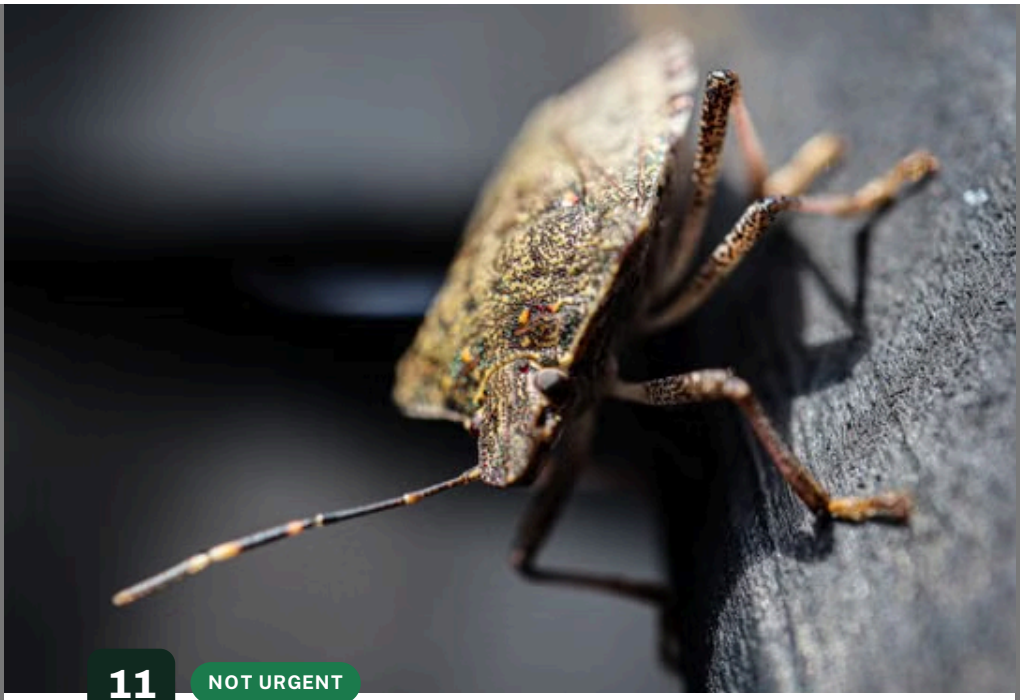

11 NOT URGENT

PEST 11 OF 11

Stink bugs & fall invaders

SIZE
1/4–3/4 in.

FOUND IN
Sunny south and west walls in fall, then attics, window frames and wall voids over winter.

What it looks like

Stink bugs are brown and shield-shaped. Lady beetles are round and orange or red. Boxelder bugs are black with red markings.

Prevent it next time

- Seal gaps around windows and siding before fall.
- Repair screens.
- Vacuum, don't crush.

Often confused with

Kissing bugs, which have a cone-shaped head and red-orange bands. Stink bugs are shield-shaped and brown.

Signs to look for

- Clusters on outside walls in fall
- Bugs showing up near windows on warm winter days
- A sharp odor when stink bugs are crushed
- Stains on curtains or walls

Do this now

1. Vacuum them up rather than crushing them.
2. Seal gaps around windows and siding before fall.

What the pro will do

1. Treats sunny outside walls in late summer.
2. Seals entry points.
3. Advises on attic and wall voids.

> Not dangerous. Call to seal and treat the outside before the next fall season.

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SIDE BY SIDE

Common look-alikes

The mix-ups homeowners make most, and the quickest way to tell them apart.

Termite or flying ant?

	Termite swarmer	Flying ant
WAIST	Straight, thick	Pinched, narrow
ANTENNAE	Straight	Bent at an elbow
WINGS	Two pairs, equal length	Front pair longer
COLOR	Dark brown or black	Black, brown or reddish

Mouse or rat?

	House mouse	Rat
BODY	2.5–4 in.	7–10 in.
HEAD	Small, pointed nose, big ears	Blunt nose, smaller ears
TAIL	Thin, about body length	Thick and scaly
DROPPINGS	Grain of rice	Raisin-sized

Still not sure? Describe what you see on the phone and a local pro can tell you which it is.

SIDE BY SIDE

Common look-alikes

The mix-ups homeowners make most, and the quickest way to tell them apart.

Bed bug or carpet beetle?

	Bed bug	Carpet beetle
SHAPE	Flat, oval, wingless	Round, dome-shaped
COLOR	Reddish-brown	Mottled black, white and yellow
FOUND	Mattress seams, headboards	Rugs, closets, windowsills
BITES	Yes, while you sleep	No (larvae can irritate skin)

Wasp or honey bee?

	Wasp or yellowjacket	Honey bee
BODY	Smooth, shiny, narrow waist	Fuzzy, rounder
COLOR	Bright yellow and black	Golden-brown
NEST	Papery gray or in the ground	Wax comb in a cavity
BEHAVIOR	Can sting repeatedly	Stings once

Still not sure? Describe what you see on the phone and a local pro can tell you which it is.

HOW TO

Identification tips

Photo with a coin

A clear, close photo next to a coin shows size.

Count the legs

Six legs: an insect. Eight: a spider, tick or scorpion.

Note where and when

Kitchen at night, bedroom in the morning, walls in fall.

Keep a sample

If safe, keep one in a sealed bag or on clear tape.

Leave nests alone

Don't spray or seal wasp and hornet nests.

Check the whole home

One sighting often means more nearby.

FILL THIS IN TODAY

Our home's pest log

Five minutes now spares you a scramble later. Keep this page with the guide.

Pests we've seen, and where:

Date of last treatment:

Pets in the home:

Areas with moisture:

Gaps to seal:

Pest company we used before:

Notes:

THROUGH THE YEAR

Pests through the year

A few minutes each season heads off the most common problems.

Winter

- Watch for mice in the kitchen and attic.
- Check stored boxes.
- Keep firewood outside.
- Listen for scratching at night.

Spring

- Look for termite swarmers.
- Check eaves for small nests.
- Seal gaps before ants arrive.
- Clean the pantry.

Summer

- Tip out standing water weekly.
- Watch for wasps under decks.
- Inspect luggage after trips.
- Keep grass trimmed.

Fall

- Seal gaps before mice move in.
- Add door sweeps.
- Move firewood away from the house.
- Check sills for fall invaders.

Pest identification questions

How do I identify a bug in my house?

Note its size, color, number of legs, wings and where you saw it, then compare it with the pest pages in this guide. A clear photo next to a coin helps. If you still aren't sure, call and describe it, and a local pest control company can tell you what it likely is.

What's the difference between termites and flying ants?

Termite swarmers have a straight waist, straight antennae and two pairs of wings of equal length. Flying ants have a pinched waist, bent antennae and front wings longer than the back ones.

Are mouse droppings dangerous?

They can carry germs. Don't sweep or vacuum them dry. Wear gloves, spray them with a disinfectant, wait a few minutes, then wipe them up and seal them in a bag.

How can I tell mouse droppings from rat droppings?

Mouse droppings are small, about the size of a grain of rice, with pointed ends. Rat droppings are much larger, closer to a raisin, and often blunt at one end.

How do I know if I have bed bugs or another biting bug?

Bed bug bites often appear in lines or clusters after sleeping, with rust-colored spots on sheets. Flea bites tend to be around the ankles, often in homes with pets. Check mattress seams with a flashlight.

What do bed bugs look like to the naked eye?

Adults are flat, oval, reddish-brown and about the size of an apple seed. Young bed bugs are pale and as small as a pinhead, and turn red after feeding.

Pest identification questions (continued)

What does it mean if I see a cockroach during the day?

Cockroaches prefer the dark, so seeing one in daylight often means hiding spots are crowded and the population is large.

What does a termite mud tube look like?

A pencil-width tunnel of soil running up a foundation wall, pier or beam. Termites build them to travel between the soil and wood while staying moist.

Why do I suddenly have ants in my kitchen?

Ants follow scent trails to food and water. Rain, heat or a new food source can bring a trail indoors. Wipe the trail with soapy water and seal food.

How do I tell a wasp from a bee?

Wasps are smooth and shiny with a narrow waist. Honey bees are fuzzy and golden-brown. If you aren't sure, keep your distance and call.

How do I identify a black widow or brown recluse?

A black widow is shiny black with a red hourglass under the belly. A brown recluse is tan with a darker violin-shaped mark behind the head and six eyes in pairs.

Why are there so many spiders in my house?

Lots of spiders usually means lots of other bugs for them to eat. Reducing the insects indoors brings spider numbers down too.

Pest identification questions (continued)

How do I know if my home has fleas?

Pets scratching, small itchy bites around your ankles, and black specks (flea dirt) in pet bedding are the common signs. Fleas can stay in carpets even after pets are treated.

Which states have scorpions in homes?

Mostly Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, Southern California, Oklahoma and nearby areas. The Arizona bark scorpion is the one most often found indoors.

Why are stink bugs in my house in fall and winter?

They move into walls and attics to spend the winter, then wander out on warm days. They don't breed indoors or damage the house.

Which pests need help right away?

Wasp or hornet nests near doors, scorpions where children sleep, signs of mice or rats in the kitchen, and bed bugs. For a sting with trouble breathing, call 911 first.

Can a pest control company identify a bug from a photo?

Often, yes. Describe it on the phone and mention you have a photo. A sample in a sealed bag or on clear tape also helps at the visit.

CUT OUT AND KEEP

When something goes wrong

1. Seal food and take out the trash.
2. Keep kids and pets away from droppings and nests.
3. Don't spray a wasp nest or set off foggers.
4. Sting with trouble breathing? Call 911 first.
5. Photograph droppings, bugs or damage.
6. Call a pest pro and describe what you see.

KEEP THIS NUMBER IN YOUR PHONE

(833) 839-9596

Scan for the online guide

with the 60-second problem finder and more answers.

emergencyexterminators.com/pest-identification-guide/

KEEP HANDY

Important numbers

Fill these in now, so you're not searching when something goes wrong.

Emergency: 911

Gas utility emergency line

Water utility

Electric utility

Plumber

Neighbor with a spare key

Policy number for your home

YOUR LOCAL PRO LINE

(833) 839-9596



Notes

EmergencyExterminators

EmergencyExterminators connects homeowners with independent local pest control companies for insects, spiders, scorpions, mice and rats.

How we're paid

EmergencyExterminators is a referral service. Homeowners don't pay us. Independent local companies in our network pay us when we connect them with homeowners who call. We don't perform the work, and any work, timing and terms are agreed directly between you and the company.

Important

This guide is general information, not advice for your specific home. Every home is different. In an emergency, or if anyone is in danger, call 911 first. Before you hire anyone, confirm they hold the credentials required for the work in your area. Same-day service is subject to availability. Calls may be recorded for quality purposes.

Photos

Photographs are stock images from Pexels and Unsplash, used under each site's terms, to illustrate common problems. They don't show specific companies, jobs or customers. Any people shown are models.

What is that bug?
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EmergencyExterminators

WHEN YOU NEED HELP

One call to a local pro

CALL

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Scan for the online guide

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