

## Squash bugs

Squash bugs are shield shaped insects that reach about 5/8 of an inch in length. These insects are grey to brown and adults have fully developed wings, while nymphs (immatures) have wing pads. Eggs are elliptical, reddish-brown, and laid singly but in clusters (usually on the underside of the leaves or along the stems).



Squash bugs overwinter as adults in protected areas. They emerge in spring to search out cucurbit plants where they mate and lay eggs. Eggs hatch in about 10 days and nymphs take about a month to reach adulthood.

There can be 1-2 generations per year and life stages overlap. Squash bugs like to hang out near the crown of the plant, under leaves, or other protected areas. The insects hide and scurry for cover when disturbed. Late in the growing season, when vines are dying, adults and nymphs often congregate on the fruit. Nymphs die with freezing temperatures while adults find protected locations.



Squash bugs feed on squash, pumpkin, melon and other plants in the cucurbit family. They have piercing-sucking mouthparts that are inserted into plant tissue to suck out juices. Damage appears as yellowing of foliage that eventually turns brown. Younger plants have more problems with heavy infestations of squash bugs and feeding can lead to wilting and possibly death. Squash bugs may also feed on developing fruit causing it to become scarred.

To help manage squash bugs, inspect plants for eggs on a regular basis and squish eggs before they hatch. Create traps using wood boards or newspapers; check traps each morning and kill any bugs found. For vining squash, trellising can provide fewer harborage areas for insects to hide. Use row cover to protect plants from squash bugs and remove the cover during bloom to allow for pollination. Remove old plants after harvest is complete and clean up debris to reduce overwintering sites.

Insects can be handpicked or vacuumed from the plant. If a pesticide is needed, look for less-toxic active ingredients such as insecticidal soap, azadirachtin (neem) or horticultural oils for smaller nymphs.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at [www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com](http://www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com)

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