

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER



University of Kentucky  
College of Agriculture,  
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**HORTICULTURE EDUCATION**  
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Insect Pests Appear in Lawn and Landscape  
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Fall armyworms are appearing again. The last time they were a challenge was an historic outbreak in lawns and pastures in 2021. Where did they come from? In addition, what are the bugs that look like lint falling from the sky and landing on plants? Where did they come from?

Fall armyworms are a tropical species and do not overwinter in Kentucky. They overwinter in southern Florida and southern Texas. The warm temperatures in these locations allow this pest to live, mate, and produce the next generations that migrate northward. In April the moths move into Mississippi and Alabama. Adult moths are seen arriving in Kentucky in late June or early July.

The fall armyworm moth is gray-brown in color. The dark honeycombed markings on the wings include a white spot near the center of each wing on the lower portion of the wing. The wingspan of the moth is 1.25 inches. It also has a brown dark head.

The adult female moths lay spherical gray eggs in large clusters of 50 to 150, usually on grassy-type plants including turfgrass. During this time of year with a larger population of

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moths, they may even lay eggs on porch eaves or outdoor furniture. The mass of eggs has a coating of moth scales or fine bristles covering them. The eggs hatch in 3 to 5 days. The larvae then begin feeding.

The larva are light tan to black in color with three light yellow stripes and a wavy yellow-red blotch stripe on each side according to Dr. Ric Bessin, University of Kentucky Extension Specialist. A key identifier is a white, upside down “Y” mark on the front of the dark head.

The sign that fall armyworms are in the yard causing damage is a spot in the lawn which appears to look drought stressed. More brown and thinned out spots with exposed crowns and soil appear in the lawn as the caterpillars move across the lawn like an army feeding on the grass blades. The larvae are not seen because they are hidden in the lower portion of the grass. To find the larvae, homeowners can dump a jug of soapy water onto the lawn which causes the caterpillars to rise to the top of the grass.

If you have seen large numbers of egg masses, it would be important to check your lawn for the larvae. According to Dr. Jonathan Larson, University of Kentucky Entomology Extension Specialist, if you are seeing a concerning amount of damage, you can minimize their feeding with pyrethroid products like bifenthrin, cyhalothrin, and others. Organic options Bt and Spinosad will work when caterpillars are smaller and might be effective if another generation of armyworms develops here.

In another situation involving insects, people in western Kentucky have seen flying bugs resembling cotton lint. The insects land on plants, cars, and people. According to Dr. Raul Villanueva, University of Kentucky, Entomology Extension Specialist at the UK Research and

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Education Center in Princeton, KY, the insects could be any of several different species of woolly aphids. This includes the alder, apple, elm, or hackberry woolly aphids. A waxy secretion that covers the insect's legs, antennae, and around the wings make them look like cotton lint or snowflake.

Aphids feed on the sap of the host plant. They excrete a liquid sweet waste called honeydew. The honeydew collects on leaves, and a fungus called sooty mold grows, turning the leaves and branches black. The leaves that are fed upon, are twisted, curled, or yellow, and may grow poorly.

To manage this insect, beneficial insects such as ladybeetles, lace wings, and other parasitoids may take care of the aphids without insecticide applications. If intervention is required to decrease the numbers of woolly aphids, Dr. Villanueva suggests that plants can be treated with horticultural oils or soaps and conventional insecticides if required. Applications to large trees is difficult. Follow label directions on these products to make sure they can be used.

In general, woolly aphids use two host plants during the year. They lay eggs on the primary host in the fall and overwinter. The females hatch from the eggs in the spring and produce one or two generations of winged adults without mating that fly to their secondary host. Several generations will feed and develop over the summer there. In the early fall, a winged generation is produced. This generation returns to the primary host. There males and females will be produced and mate. The female lays eggs there to survive the winter.

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For more information about fall armyworms or woolly aphids, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or by email at [annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

## **Annette's Tip:**

The rule of thumb for dividing perennials now is to complete the division process by October 1. This gives the plants time to establish a good root system after they are planted again; otherwise, they may heave or push out of the ground when the soil freezes and thaws this winter which may cause them to dry out or freeze and die.

## **Upcoming Event:**

“Saving Our Pollinators with Native Plants” will be presented by Extension Master Gardener Regenia Sims on September 12 at 10:00 a.m. at the Native Plant Garden in the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden. Join us to learn about Kentucky native plants for pollinators and see how the garden has matured over time.

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