

Cockroaches by Lloyd Eighme, retired entomologist

Some insects have found human habitations to be better places to live than the natural ecosystem. Our houses are controlled environments protected from extreme fluctuations in temperature and moisture and often with a constantly available supply of food. Cockroaches are mainly tropical insects that could not survive out of doors in our colder temperate climate. They live here only in heated buildings and are transported in shipments of food and luggage. There is no way to completely prevent the arrival of cockroaches in your house. As careful as large food storage warehouses are there are cockroaches stowed away in container shipments that can end up in local grocery stores. The female cockroach lays eggs in tough egg cases containing 10 or more eggs that can be tucked into small spaces or carried with the female into hiding. Once when we were unpacking our luggage after returning from a tour, a cockroach went scurrying away from the suitcase. I was not quick enough to stomp on it before it hid behind the furniture. It must have been a male because we never saw it or any others again. If it had been an egg laying female or if we had brought both males and females home with us we could have had an infestation of cockroaches in our house.

Four of the many different kinds of cockroaches are likely to be pests in our homes here in Skagit county. The brown-banded cockroach (*Supella longipalpa*) originally from Africa and the German cockroach (*Blatella germanica*) originally from Southeast Asia both live only in heated buildings and do not survive outside. The American cockroach (*Periplaneta americana*) originally from Africa and the oriental cockroach (*Blatta orientalis*) originally from the Middle East will live as well outside, but in our climate they only survive the winter by moving inside. There are a few native species of cockroaches that were here in North America before houses were built and they still prefer the natural ecosystem rather than our houses. The one that is common on the Pacific Coast, the woods roach (*Parcoblatta americana*) has not been recorded this far north.

People do not like cockroaches for several reasons. They are often associated with filth and debris, they are active at night when we cannot see them, and they have a distinctive offensive odor. Cockroaches in the home are an aesthetic nuisance and their presence may even lower the value of property. Fortunately, numerous methods of control have been developed to help you keep your property free from cockroaches. There are both chemical and non-chemical methods of getting rid of cockroaches and you can find many of them on the shelves of home and garden stores. Be sure to read labels carefully and follow instructions to prevent damage to people and pets. Read EB 0472.

Cockroaches thrive on the same foods we eat mainly because it is readily available to them. Food scraps left exposed either in the kitchen or garbage are easily found and eaten by cockroaches. Removing their source of food will not only greatly reduce their numbers, it will also force them to go to the traps or poison baits put out to control them. Pet foods that are often available to cockroaches even at night provide a food source for them that can support a large population.

Those who have traveled or lived in the warmer tropical climates can tell stories about cockroaches that horrify us northerners. Our beautiful Skagit valley may have some problems, but we can be thankful we do not share our homes with mouse-sized cockroaches.



Fig. 2. German Cockroach, *Blattella germanica*, female. Note protruding egg case.
(Actual length —————)



Fig. 3. American Cockroach, *Periplaneta americana*, male.
(Actual length —————)



Fig. 4. Brownbanded Cockroach, *Supella longipalpa*, female. Note bands across wings.
(Actual length —————)



Fig. 5. Oriental Cockroach, *Blatta orientalis*, female.
(Actual length —————)