

The Drugstore Beetle

by Lloyd Eighme, Retired Entomologist

This little beetle, less than 1/8 inch long, is frequently brought to the MG Clinic by frustrated housewives who find it in their kitchens. Master Gardeners are trained to help solve gardening problems, but since we deal with insects, clients expect us to help them control insects no matter where they are found. This one can pose a serious problem.

The name Drugstore Beetle (*Stegobium paniceum*) was applied many years ago when it was found feeding on poisonous products such as strichnine treated wheat, belladonna, mustard plaster and tobacco. Those things are not found in today's kitchens, but the larva of this beetle is not fussy in its eating habits and still finds plenty to eat. According to the literature, remains of the Drugstore Beetle were found in stone vases in the tomb of Egyptian King Tutankhamen which were sealed around 1100 B.C. It was also mentioned as the bread beetle "Brodtkäfer" in Germany in 1721 and in our own Pacific Northwest it has been in Seattle since 1913. Specimens brought to clinic are usually found in dried cereal products such as flour, pasta and pet food.

The eggs laid by this little beetle are so small they are rarely noticed and the larva that hatches from the egg to begin feeding is very difficult to see because it burrows into the food. You might consider this insect beneficial as it pre-digests some of your food for you. (I prefer to do my own work, thank you!) In a warm kitchen the development is rapid and in 4-5 weeks a few beetles can turn into hundreds. The adults move out in search of new food supplies and that is when they are seen crawling about in the kitchen or storage room.

You should read EB 0973 for suggestions on how to control this pest. Chemical insecticides cannot be used on food, so other methods must be suggested. Sanitation is one of the things mentioned, but be careful not to imply that the client keeps a messy kitchen. The large grocery supply warehouses do everything possible to keep this pest out of stored food, but in spite of all their efforts you may occasionally bring infested packages of food home from the store. The source of beetles in the kitchen is often an old package of flour, meal or cereal that has been on the back shelf for a long time. Finding and eliminating the source may solve the problem. Sometimes it takes some detective-like work of investigating to solve the problem.

One client was finding these beetles in the bathroom. After some questioning, it was found that they kept a sack of dry pellet pet food in the bathroom and that was the source of the Drugstore Beetles. Sometimes the beetles appear from strange places like under refrigerators or from behind the stove. Sometimes mice

will carry food away and store it in strange places and that can be a source of beetles.

If you find Drugstore Beetles in your house, do not despair, they can be eliminated. Understanding their life cycle and habits makes it much easier to successfully control them. Hopefully, the information in this article will help you or someone you want to help overcome this common problem.

The accompanying photographs were taken with the MG microscope. We purchased the camera attachments for this very purpose and it is good to see them being used. If you are interested in taking pictures with the microscope, let us know.



Drugstore Beetle. (about 1/8 inch long)



Drugstore Beetle. Notice the hood-like pronotum over the head and the 3 segmented club of the antenna. These two features help identify this beetle compared with many other little brown beetles.