

Oriental Cockroach



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Several species of cockroaches are household pests in West Virginia. The oriental cockroach, *Blatta orientalis*, often referred to as a “waterbug,” is one of the most common cockroach pests in houses.

Identification

Cockroaches typically are flattened insects with long antennae and spiny legs. The oriental cockroach is dark brown to almost black in color. The adult males are 1-inch long with wings about three-fourths as long as their bodies. Adult females are 1-1/2 inch long and wingless, having only very short wing stubs.

The oriental cockroach is one of the filthiest of cockroaches – its mere presence and large size, not to mention its bad odor, are enough to make anyone want to get rid of them.

Cockroaches possess incomplete metamorphosis, meaning that there are three basic life stages—egg, nymph, and adult. The nymphs or immature stages of the oriental cockroach resemble the adults but are lighter brown and smaller—newly hatched nymphs are only 1/4-inch long. They go through seven to ten nymphal stages, becoming larger and darker and looking more and more like the adults at each stage.

Biology and Habits

Like many other species of cockroaches, oriental cockroaches are nocturnal. This means they become active and search for food during the

night. They will eat practically anything they can find, from the finest gourmet fare to the disgusting slime that builds up in drains. The oriental cockroach is one of the filthiest of cockroaches—its mere presence and large size, not to mention its bad odor, are enough to make anyone want to get rid of them. They contaminate food with their saliva and feces and also carry *Salmonella* bacteria, which can cause food poisoning.

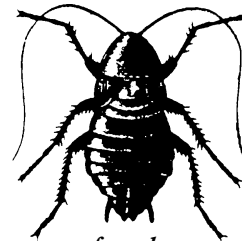
Oriental cockroaches are more sluggish than other cockroaches, neither moving as fast nor climbing as well. Neither the male nor the female is able to fly. Their preferred habitat is at or below ground level in damp areas, such as under porches and in basements, crawlspaces, and drains. They like temperatures ranging from 68 to 84 degrees F. Unlike some other domestic cockroaches, the oriental cockroach is able to survive outdoors under vegetation and is often seen outside in summer. During very dry or cold weather, they will often move indoors in search of moisture or warmth.

The female oriental cockroach lays her eggs in brown, beanlike, 3/8-inch-long egg cases, each containing 16 eggs. She deposits the egg case in a protected location soon after it is formed. Compared to other cockroaches, the oriental cockroach reproduces rather slowly, requiring up to a year to complete its life cycle.

The life cycle of the oriental cockroach is very seasonal, in that the numbers of adult and



Egg case



female



male

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nymphal oriental cockroaches vary at different times of year. In the summer, the number of adult oriental cockroaches reaches its peak. They reproduce and then die, leaving mostly nymphs in the population in the fall and throughout the winter. The natural mortality of adults in the fall can be misleading in a control program, as the sight of dead cockroaches convinces homeowners that whatever they did must have worked!

Prevention Methods

Sanitation is the key to preventing cockroach infestations. Good housekeeping, plus moisture control, will go a long way toward eliminating the three primary needs of cockroaches—food, water, and hiding places or “harborages.” You can eliminate sources of food and water by cleaning up crumbs and spills, putting away pet food after pets eat, and not leaving dirty dishes in the sink. Place your garbage outside in cans with tight-fitting lids or tightly sealed bags—loose garbage in paper bags or cardboard boxes provides food for cockroaches. Don’t let too much refuse accumulate around the house, since piles of empty paper grocery bags or corrugated boxes provide excellent hiding places.

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Keeping abreast of home repairs is another prevention method. Remedy damp conditions, such as plumbing leaks or wet basements. Apply a caulking compound to crevices indoors, and repair cracks in the foundation and walls to reduce harborages and lessen the chance that cockroaches can enter. Caulk openings in kitchens and bathrooms where plumbing pipes pass through walls.

Floor drains are a common, but often overlooked, source of oriental cockroach infestations. The drain may provide both a source of food, in the form of “drain slime,” and an entry point into houses. To prevent oriental cockroaches from

entering through floor drains, cover the drain with screen. Cut a piece of wire screen to fit under the drain’s sieve plate. Screen with a fine mesh is necessary to exclude tiny, newly hatched nymphs.

Control Strategies

Pest Management Program. An integrated pest management program for the oriental cockroach combines monitoring with sticky traps, nonchemical tactics (i.e., sanitation, repairs), and an initial treatment with a less toxic insecticide, followed by cockroach bait stations to maintain control at an acceptable level.

Boric acid and diatomaceous earth are both labeled for indoor use against cockroaches. Use a bulb duster to apply the dust into cracks and crevices in areas where you have seen cockroaches. Don’t use boric acid outdoors, since it is poisonous to plants. Be certain to wear a dust mask and to follow label directions.

Cockroach bait stations are another control alternative. These are available in various types and sizes and with different active ingredients. Bait stations have the advantage of decreasing both the amount of insecticide used and the likelihood of exposure to it. Be certain to purchase the type for large cockroach species, since some bait stations have openings designed for smaller species of cockroaches. Place bait stations near cockroach harborages in corners and along edges. Be sure to use the number recommended in the package directions, usually two or three per 100 square feet. Never place bait stations on surfaces where an insecticide has been applied.

Cockroach sticky traps are often marketed as nontoxic cockroach control tools. They may provide a limited amount of control, but their greatest value is as a tool for monitoring. Cockroaches crossing the traps adhere to the glue and are unable to escape. Place them in areas around the house to help you decide where harborage areas are and where control methods should be applied.

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