

## **TINY COMMON BEETLES LIKE TO EAT YOUR STORED FOOD AND PANTRY ITEMS**

By Ralph E. Mitchell, *Director/Horticulture Agent of Charlotte County Extension Service*

Can you name a local beetle that was also found in King Tut's tomb? The answer is the cigarette beetle. How about a stored-product beetle that has been noted sarcastically as an insect that "eats anything but cast iron"? That would be none other than the drugstore beetle. These tiny pests are common household insects that look similar and even feed on similar foods. We just had a sample brought into our office for identification last week. Known to invade stored pantry products, and other similar foodstuffs, these beetles are easy to suppress with common sense strategies.

As the name implies, the cigarette beetle, also known as the tobacco beetle, feeds on tobacco leaves, cigars, cigarettes and chewing tobacco. Being somewhat versatile, these pests can also feed on items such as flour, cereal, cocoa, herbs, spices, nuts, dried fruit and dog food. They may also turn up eating some non-food materials such as dried flowers and decorative wreaths. As an aid in consuming some of these low nutritional foods, the cigarette beetle has a mutually beneficial relationship with a type of yeast that produces B vitamins for the beetle. Pretty impressive for only an eighth of an inch long insect! The complete life cycle of this minute brown beetle can occur in as little as forty days depending on food and temperature.

The drugstore beetle looks very similar to the cigarette beetle except for two distinguishing factors. Using a magnifying glass, you will note that the antennae on the drugstore beetle end in a three-segmented club shape while the cigarette beetle's antennae is toothed or serrated. Another

feature in difference is that the cigarette beetle has the ability to tuck its head under its body. The tiny brown drugstore beetle likes to feed on bread, cookies, chocolate, spices, flour and dry mixes. They also can be found feeding on wool, hair, leather and horn; also with the help of a type of yeast. The literature also indicates that they have been known to even bore into tin or aluminum foil, as well as, lead sheets! Drugstore beetles go from egg to larvae to pupae to adult within a life cycle of two to seven months. The management of both the drugstore and cigarette beetle are simple and common sense.



*Adult cigarette beetle, Lasioderma serricornis (F.).  
Photograph by: L.J. Buss, University of Florida*

The first step in our control program is locating the source of the infestation. Examine the various stored products noted above (and other similar items) and check for beetles or larvae. The original infestation may have even come in from an outside source. All infested material should be wrapped in heavy plastic and thrown away. Clean up any spilled crumbs, flour, etc. with a vacuum. Store all future items in

airtight glass, metal or plastic containers. Using a clear container is best as this allows you to easily inspect for infestations. Chemical pesticides are just not warranted in this case. The saying, "Do you want to turn off the faucet or mop up the floor?" applies in this situation.

The presence of these types of stored-product pests are very common. Monitor for infestations so that they can be dealt with while small.

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For more information on all types of pantry pests, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Demonstration Garden (6900 Florida Street, PG)** Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of month 9:00am-12:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Peachland Promenades Publix** 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Lowes Garden Center Murdock** 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Extension Service. You may contact him by email ([Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com](mailto:Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com)). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 941.764.4340 or by email ([Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com](mailto:Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com)).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

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*Resource:*

*Cabrera, B.J. (2007) Drugstore Beetle, Stegobium paniceum, UF/IFAS Extension Service - Featured Creatures.*

*Cabrera, B.J. (2006) Cigarette Beetle, Lasioderma serricorne, UF/IFAS Extension Service.*