

Mites in March spell trouble

How to deal with these garden and home pests

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With perennials waking and buds swelling, we feel the call to get outside and reconnect with the earth. Each warm weekend we linger longer in the yard, reveling in the emergence of bulbs and blossoms. Yet, just as we feel the season's change, so do others in the landscape. They're out there now, getting busy and quietly enacting plans to take over more territory in your yard.

March is the miteiest month, not because it comes in like a lion, but because it heralds the climax of the smallest nuisances in the yard: Grass mites. And between feeding on the lawn and entering our homes, they've launched a campaign of annoyance.

Perhaps the most startling natural phenomenon that happens to many of us in the Front Range is the annual migration of clover mites into our homes. Moving by the hundreds, the tiny, bright orange arachnids clamber walls and slides in around windows.

The first appearance doesn't raise more than an eyebrow, as one or two crawl across the desk. But then two becomes 10 and slowly that number creeps upward, until the warm day

dawns when the mass moves indoors, teeming along the windowsill and streaming to the floor.

Normally, I'm not given to fear-mongering, especially about bugs and arachnids. Clover mites won't cart off the cat for a luau on the deck. But they leave a red-orange smear once squished, and like a chalk outline around the carcass, reminds me of the crawler each time I see it on paper, book, or curtain. Creepy.

Outside, clover mites feed on turf grass or other plants. They're unremarkable in the landscape; they don't damage a lot of the lawn. But when lawns are nestled up against the house, the trouble starts, so plan your landscape to leave a barrier between plants and walls.

Within, controlling these mites is fairly simple. Simply place a quarter inch wide line of powder along the window-sill from side to side, being certain that the powder touches the side walls. This barrier, according to Dr. Whitney Cranshaw, state entomologist and professor at Colorado State University, is enough to stop them in their tracks. Any powder works, such as baby powder, corn starch, or baking powder. As the mites crawl into it, they're rapidly incapacitated and dry out.

When the powder has gotten filled with mites it will turn a light orange color, a sure sign that it's time to vacuum it up and apply a fresh barrier. Continue this until May, after the mites are actively entering homes.

As you're battling mites in the home, keep an eye on the lawn, since more damaging mites are at

the peak of feeding for the winter. During warm winters, such as what we've had, mite populations explode.

Hatched in October, mite numbers increase into winter. As they feed, rasping off the leaf surface and sucking up tender, interior cells, the damage appears as small yellow speckles on the grass blades. As feeding intensifies, the grass becomes straw colored and eventually dies, leaving large patches that don't green up in spring. Balmly winter temperatures sets mite metabolisms into overdrive, and by this time of year, populations can reach several thousand per square foot.

This damage is often misdiagnosed as winterkill or desiccation. If you've had mite damaged lawn, take a quick look to see if they've returned. Check the base of the plant for congregations of them during the day.

If you see them, irrigate the lawn to raise humidity or check with a local lawn care company for stronger treatments. Snow cover doesn't put a stop to their feeding, since it provides protection, but as it melts, the moisture helps drive off the mites.



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FRONT RANGE GARDENING



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STAGE

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the result in getting the house sold quickly for the best, highest price.

A JUMP ON THE COMPETITION

With spring fast approaching, more homes will be coming onto the market. A seller can increase the chances of their home showing better than the competition by calling on a professional stager for help. A homeowner living in the house while on the market can benefit from a stager's knowledge and experience in applying interior re-design principles (using what the homeowner already has) to enhance an overall space. Stagers will also make recommendations on paint colors, décor, space-saving furniture arrangements and even identifying any cleaning, repairs, organization or de-cluttering that may be needed. In addition, a home stager is trained to find solutions to any problem areas in the home and turn them into positive features. Décor can also sometimes be supplied by the home stager. A vacant home on the market may need updated furniture and accessories brought in to transform empty spaces into warm and inviting spaces. Main areas of focus generally include living rooms, family rooms, kitchens, dining rooms and master bedrooms.

SITTING PRETTY

Once a home is showing its best, sellers should make

the most of staging dollars spent by getting photos of the staged home placed on the MLS right away by their Realtor. Since the National Association of Realtors states that nearly 85 percent of potential buyers start their search on the internet, it is crucial for them to see that a home is neat, inviting and well organized with a polished, pulled together look. That way, the chances of potential buyers setting an appointment for a showing is greater, producing favorable results faster. Further, every attempt should be made to keep the home looking as the stager left it — sometimes proving to be a challenge for families living in the house while on the market. That's why some home stagers will include a no-cost follow up visit a month or so down the road to ensure the home is still showing its best.

By preparing mentally to sell and getting a jump on the competition this spring by investing in home staging, a homeowner will likely see how more interested buyers translates into a quicker sale and more money back into their pocket.

Jill is a Home Staging Expert (HSE) certified stager and redesign specialist serving the Northern Colorado area. For questions or more information, email Jill Schuett of Applause Home Staging, LLC. jill.applause@comcast.net, or go to www.applausehomestaging.com

GLINK

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number of upcoming cases where banks go after their former borrowers for these deficiencies. Collection agencies are already knocking on former (and unsuspecting) homeowners' doors.

If you are able to sell your home in a short sale, you can try to negotiate with the lender to waive any right to go after you for the deficiency. However, I have heard from a number of attorneys that lenders have been reluctant to agree to waive their rights to go after the borrowers for any amount that may be owed the banks.

If you can do a short sale, it's probably a better (though certainly longer and more frustrating) move than letting the property go into foreclosure. Frequently, lenders get less money in a foreclosure sale than you would get in a short sale, so you'd think it would make more sense for the lender to agree to a short sale. But if, for whatever reason, the lender won't agree to the short sale, your options may be limited.

It's also interesting to note that some condo associations have decided not to allow their owners to rent units even if there aren't any willing buyers.

While it is better to have owner-occupied units than rental units, I think it's far worse to have vacant units with owners who won't or can't pay their share of the condominium expenses. That just puts a bigger burden on all of the other owners of the property.

In many cases, condo associations are better off allowing more unit owners to rent properties if that will stabilize cash flow and allow the property to be properly maintained.

When you live in a condo building or townhome development, walking away from the unit will not be a popular choice with your neighbors or others who believe you have a duty and an obligation to continue to make your payments, no matter what. That said, there are also condo unit boards that have had trouble with tenants, including bad renters, high turnover and additional costs associated with that high rate of turnover.

But for some homeowners who simply can't afford to carry their vacant properties, it may be their only choice. If you decide to go in this direction, consult with a real estate attorney first, to make sure you understand your legal options and what consequences you may face.

And, when it comes to homeowner associations, they will have to make a determination about which way they want to go during these uncertain times.

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